

MISERABLE BUSINESS OF WAR AFLOAT: THE AUGUST 1864 CRUISE OF THE CSS
TALLAHASSEE

Michael D. Robinson

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Approved By

Advisory Committee

Chair

Accepted By

Dean, Graduate School

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this thesis is the August 1864 cruise of the Confederate commerce raider CSS *Tallahassee*. Commanded by John Taylor Wood, the cruise up and down the coasts of New York and New England lasted only twenty days but resulted in the destruction or bonding of thirty-one merchant vessels. Naval historians have addressed this cruise as an isolated example of Confederate commerce raiding and failed to place the cruise in the larger context of the war. This study is an attempt to investigate the cruise in greater depth and breadth. The mission was specifically designed to alleviate the pressure of the Federal blockade off Wilmington and harass the Union merchant marine, but other motivations have not been adequately examined. This thesis ties the cruise of the *Tallahassee* into the grand strategy of the Confederacy in the summer of 1864, including plan to secure independence by influencing the United States presidential election of November 1864. The reaction of the Northern populace to the cruise is considered, as well as effect the cruise had on Anglo-Confederate relations. Finally, in addition to providing a glimpse of the cruise itself, the long-term implications of the cruise are considered. Ironically, the cruise contributed to the downfall of the Confederate States of America. Northern officials and the press viewed the *Tallahassee* as a pirate, strengthening the call to close the port from whence the raider embarked, Wilmington, North Carolina. The disagreements among Confederate leaders over the cruise highlighted other problems that plagued the Confederacy. The object of this study is to bring the motivations and ramifications of this cruise to light. Historians have only recounted the events of the cruise without carefully considering why the cruise was designed or the overarching results of the mission. Careful primary and secondary research was undertaken for this thesis. While this study fits into the realm of naval and military

history, the writer uses the fields of political history, diplomatic history, and social history to better tell the story of the CSS *Tallahassee*.

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents and my sister. Without their support, guidance, and encouragement, none of this would be possible.

CHAPTER ONE-INTRODUCTION

As the sun rose on August 26, 1864, sailors aboard the USS *Monticello* peered toward the North Carolina coast, hoping to locate the vessel they had spotted the night before. To these sailors, blockading duty was a game of waiting, yet the previous night's activities now kept most of these tired men awake and on high alert. The *Monticello*, under the command of Acting Master Henry A. Phelon, had exchanged fire about 9:40 p.m. with an unidentified vessel that Phelon regarded as "long and low in the water." The encounter lasted only ten minutes, but Phelon spent the rest of the night trying to locate the ship that had seemingly avoided capture and escaped into the darkness. During the hunt the *Monticello* came close to the artillery batteries just north of the formidable Fort Fisher, which protected New Inlet, the northern-most entrance into the Cape Fear River. Fort Fisher was the main guardian of the teeming port of Wilmington, one of the few havens left for Confederate blockade running. Soldiers in the batteries reveled at the chance to open up their cannon on one of the Union blockaders, whose commanders rarely risked testing the firepower of the mighty bastion. Phelon maneuvered his vessel away from the shore batteries without incurring any damage, perhaps as much a testimony to the prevailing darkness than as to his seamanship.¹

The USS *Mercedita*, *Santiago de Cuba*, *Britannia*, and *Niphon* all came to the assistance of the *Monticello*, yet none was able to locate the phantom vessel. Samuel Huse, commander of the *Britannia*, believed that two of the shells his gunners fired inflicted some damage upon the

¹ Henry A. Phelon to Acting Rear-Admiral S.P. Lee, August 26, 1864, *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion* (hereafter cited as *ORN*), 30 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1900), series 1, vol. 3: 172. For an excellent discussion of life aboard Federal blockaders during the Civil War, see Michael J. Bennett, *Union Jacks: Yankee Sailors in the Civil War* (Chapel Hill, 2004), chapter 3. Phelon was in temporary command of the *Monticello* due to the temporary absence of regular commander Lieutenant William Barker Cushing. See S.P. Lee to Hon. Gideon Welles, August 26, 1864, *ORN*, series 1, 3: 170.

suspect. Thanks to the flash from the explosion of one of Huse's 12-pounder shells, he ascertained that the elusive ship featured a "white propeller with two smokestacks and one mast."² Huse, Phelon, and the other commanders brought their vessels closely together on August 26, in order to discuss the previous night's chase. Suddenly, the men on board the Federal vessels were alerted by the sound of booming cannon. The resonance of a twenty-one gun salute by a vessel anchored inside New Inlet was returned by the guns of Fort Fisher. As the commanders of the blockaders trained their binoculars on the vessel, they saw a Confederate flag fluttering from its mast. Here in plain view was the apparition for which they had searched in vain the previous night, defiantly under the protection of the bastion. It was the CSS *Tallahassee*, fresh from a commerce-raiding expedition on the northeastern coast of the United States.³

Several hundred miles to the north, in Washington D.C., Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles nervously awaited reports about the *Tallahassee*. It had been twenty days since the raider escaped the blockade around the Cape Fear River and made its way up the northeastern coast. During that time the *Tallahassee* menaced vessels off the coast of New York and New England, causing much consternation in the Navy Department. For three weeks Welles anguished over the bad news buzzing from the telegraph. Welles pored over messages from languid naval officers, angry civilians, and a distressed United States consul in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The correspondence confirmed the secretary's sinking feeling that the *Tallahassee* would be a tough predator to catch.

Welles's anxiety was heightened by the fact that the commander of the *Tallahassee* was John Taylor Wood, a former United States naval officer. Educated at the United States Naval

² S.P. Lee to Welles, August 26, 1864, *ORN*, series 1, 3: 170-171; Samuel Huse to S.P. Lee, August 26, 1864, *ORN*, series 1, 3: 173.

³ S.P. Lee to Welles, August 26, 1864, *ORN*, series 1, 3: 170-171.

Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, Wood held an instructor's position at the academy when the Civil War erupted in April 1861. The gloomy prospect of fighting his countrymen in the South prompted Wood to resign his commission in the United States Navy, hoping to sit out the war without taking sides. Incensed by the Navy Department's refusal to accept his resignation, Wood proffered his services to the nascent Confederate navy in September 1861.⁴ That Wood had been educated and trained in seamanship by the United States increased Welles's determination to snare the *Tallahassee* before she committed further depredations. The final blow was delivered to the Navy Department when word finally reached Welles by telegraph that the *Tallahassee* had successfully returned to Wilmington, unscathed by Federal blockaders and cruisers. Fully aware of the reaction that would follow in public circles, Acting Rear Admiral Samuel Phillips Lee assured Welles that he was doing his best to hinder the entrance and exit of steamers from the Cape Fear River. "Every effort is being made by myself, the officers and men of my command, to make the blockade off Wilmington effectual," Lee cabled Welles. "But it is impossible to prevent some violations of the blockade on dark nights by steamers built expressly for the purpose."⁵

The successful escape and return of the *Tallahassee* only bolstered the growing public perception in the North that the Lincoln administration was not effectively prosecuting the war. The months of July and August 1864 proved to be a trying time for Union forces on land and sea. Historian James McPherson posits that this period was the nadir of the United States war effort. Admiral David Farragut's sealing of Mobile Bay on August 5 of that year was indeed a Federal victory, but it came in the face of several setbacks. Resistance to the Federal draft reached new

⁴ Royce Gordon Shingleton, *John Taylor Wood: Sea Ghost of the Confederacy* (Athens, Georgia, 1979), 4-20. Although born at Fort Snelling, Iowa Territory (present day Minnesota), Wood considered himself a Southerner. Wood's official appointment in the Confederate States Navy designated Louisiana as his home state. See *Registers of Officers of the Confederate States Navy: 1861-1865* (Washington, D.C., 1931), 216.

⁵ S.P. Lee to Welles, August 26, 1864, *ORN*, series 1, 3: 171.

heights in 1863 and 1864, the Federal treasury was nearly depleted, and a feeling that the Confederate forces were unconquerable prevailed in many circles. Some citizens complained that the Lincoln administration confused the true purpose of the war, reunion, with a radical campaign to abolish slavery. Public outcries for peace arose in the North as Union forces seemed stymied in Virginia and Georgia. Many United States citizens believed that Confederate independence was a foregone conclusion and continued prosecution of the war senseless. The success of the *Tallahassee*'s recent cruise only exacerbated growing discontent in the North.⁶

Days before news arrived in Washington of the successful return to Wilmington of the *Tallahassee*, an exasperated Abraham Lincoln called his cabinet together. The Democratic Party was set to nominate its candidate for the upcoming presidential election in November, and Lincoln feared that his administration would be swept out of office. War weariness seemed to be growing daily as many Northerners voiced their displeasure. There remained little doubt that the Democrats would nominate George B. McClellan, the popular former general of the Army of the Potomac whom Lincoln had removed from command in 1862, as their candidate. A faction of the Democratic Party, known as Peace Democrats or Copperheads, used the bad news from the warfront to strengthen their arguments that Lincoln had subverted individual freedoms. The ultraconservative Copperheads appeared ready to negotiate a peace settlement with the Confederacy, accepting a fractured United States. Many people speculated that McClellan would fall under the influence of the Copperheads if elected and negotiate a peace settlement with the Confederate States of America, offering no real solutions to the issues over which the war was being fought. Lincoln recognized the demoralizing effect of the prolonged and bloody war upon the populace. Fully aware that the public blamed his administration for the debacles

⁶ James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (Oxford, 1988), 760-773; E.B. Long with Barbara Long, *The Civil War Day by Day: An Almanac, 1861-1865* (Garden City, New York, 1971), 530-564.

on the battlefield and the home front, the president circulated a “blind memorandum” to his cabinet members asking for their endorsement on August 23, 1864. Lincoln did not reveal the contents of the memorandum until after the election, but the document was an indication of the dismal situation. According to Lincoln, it was “exceedingly probable” that he would not be reelected in November. He further asserted that it would be his duty to work with McClellan before the inauguration in March 1865 to save the United States, “as he will have secured his election on such a ground that he can not possibly save it afterwards.”⁷

Lincoln’s dismay cannot be seen as merely another bout of the severe depression which occasionally overcame him. To many Northerners, the country seemed to be breaking apart at the seams. “I fear the blood and treasure spent on this summer’s campaign have done little for the country,” wrote the New York diarist George Templeton Strong. Distrustful of the Peace Democrats, Strong feared their influence. “They are moral lepers,” he wrote, “necessarily but unfortunately allowed free range and permitted to what they can to infect the whole community.” Strong was frightened by the prospect of George McClellan being elected, fearful that the former army commander would betray the two key goals of the war: restoration of the Union and emancipation for millions of enslaved African-Americans.⁸

For the leaders of the Confederacy, July and August 1864 brought renewed hope for independence. Carefully gauging the mindset of the Northern populace, many Southerners believed that Confederate nationhood might become reality if Lincoln was defeated at the polls in the upcoming presidential contest. The election of George McClellan would amount to a Northern referendum on the war. In the eyes of Confederate nationalists, Northerners would

⁷ William C. Harris, *Lincoln’s Last Months* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2004), 12-15; Memorandum Concerning His Probable Failure of Re-election, August 23, 1864, Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (hereafter cited as *CWL*), 9 vols. (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1953-1955), 7: 514-515.

⁸ August 19, 1864, George Templeton Strong, *Diary of the Civil War, 1860-1865*, ed. Allan Nevins (New York, 1962), 474.

have the chance to express their disappointment with the direction of the war and vote for peace. Confederate President Jefferson Davis, himself an ardent nationalist, looked for ways to help manipulate Northern public opinion. Davis's solution was a ground offensive into Maryland, Pennsylvania, and at Washington, D.C., in tandem with a naval raid along the northeastern coast. The president and his military advisors also hoped to alleviate the pressure exerted by Federal armed forces on the Southern home front.⁹

Conditions in the Confederacy were by no means rosy in the summer of 1864. President Davis struggled to find able generals to lead his armies in the West. Major General William T. Sherman posed a threat to Confederate forces in Georgia. Indeed, the entire Mississippi River had been under Federal control since the previous summer, effectively bisecting the Confederacy. Disaffection with Davis was being expressed in newspapers, raising concerns that the Confederate government had failed to adequately address conscription, hunger, taxes, and security. Gary Gallagher has argued, however, that Southern popular will had, in fact, not completely eroded by the summer of 1864. The Confederate people were determined to prosecute the war until independence was fairly won. As with the leaders of the Confederacy, the people were cognizant of what the Federal presidential election meant. A victory by the Democratic candidate would hopefully mean an end to the war and lend credence to Confederate

⁹ Historian Emory Thomas saw the summer of 1864 as a breaking point for Confederate nationalism, arguing that Confederate military policy reached new levels of destruction and devastation, with many advisors advocating partisan warfare. It is true that General Jubal Early burned the town of Chambersburg, Pennsylvania in his retreat from Washington in late July 1864, yet this policy was adopted by both sides by 1864, as the war took a turn toward a more destructive nature. Thomas framed the policy as desperate, due for the most part to an absence of Confederate nationalism among both soldiers and civilians. See Thomas, *The Confederate Nation* (New York, 1979), 245-277. Although Thomas made several valid points, Confederate hopes for independence were strong in the summer of 1864. The crumbling effect that Thomas described occurred more in 1865, although many Confederate nationalists were not even swayed by inevitable defeat. See Gary W. Gallagher, *The Confederate War* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1997), 157-172.

nationhood. “The words Armistice and Peace are found in the Northern papers and upon every one’s tongue here,” a Confederate war clerk in Richmond wrote in August 1864.¹⁰

This feeling that permeated the Northern and Southern populace during the summer of 1864 helped leaders in each section define their political as well as military strategies. Political and military objectives are by no means mutually exclusive. Abraham Lincoln’s leadership during the Civil War exemplified the delicate relationship between politics and the military. The president was able to coordinate his political and military aims; in the end the fractured Union was reunited and the institution of slavery was destroyed.¹¹

Yet, what if Lincoln were not reelected? Power brokers in the Confederacy astutely measured the attitudes of both the Northern and Southern populace. Jefferson Davis and a circle of Confederate nationalists that included General Robert E. Lee, Secretary of the Navy Stephen Mallory, and John Taylor Wood, planned operations in the summer of 1864 that took into account both military and political objectives. In retrospect, this was a forlorn hope. During the summer of 1864, however, hope sprung eternal. Confederate leaders designed actions to exploit Federal war weariness, secure independence through a negotiated peace, and strengthen morale in the South. Jubal Early’s 1864 campaign that would threaten Washington, D.C. exemplified the offensive motives envisioned by the Confederate nationalists.

The role of the Confederate navy in this strategy has by and large been neglected. This study, therefore, examines the role that the Confederate navy played in these schemes. It will scrutinize the August 1864 cruise of the Confederate commerce raider CSS *Tallahassee* and its

¹⁰ For a great refutation of the argument that Confederate popular will was exhausted by late 1863, see Gallagher, *The Confederate War*, especially chapter 1; August 28, 1864, John B. Jones, *A Rebel War Clerk’s Diary*, ed. Earl Schenck Miers (New York, 1961), 414.

¹¹ For an assessment of the leadership of the two Civil War presidents, see Ludwell H. Johnson, “Jefferson Davis and Abraham Lincoln as War Presidents: Nothing Succeeds Like Success,” *Civil War History* 27, No. 1 (March 1981): 49-63.

impact on both the sectional and international arenas. Overt motivations for the cruise were to lessen the presence of the Federal blockade at Wilmington in order to make it easier for blockade runners to import vital supplies for the South. Confederate leaders also hoped that the cruise along the coasts of New York and New England would strike fear into the Northern populace. Increased maritime insurance rates, along with ship owners converting their registers to neutral countries to protect their cargoes from raiders, could only help to fan the flames of discontent in the North. In turn, Jefferson Davis and John Taylor Wood hoped the cruise would influence how Northerners voted in the upcoming presidential election. Securing peace and Confederate independence was a driving force behind the mission. The cruise of the *Tallahassee* reveals the connection between military and political objectives and the impact public opinion had in the design of military operations. As the Confederate offensive during the summer of 1864 shows, leaders during the Civil War did not rely solely on the opinions of their own people when making decisions on how to prosecute the war. This study will place the August 1864 cruise of the *Tallahassee* in the larger context of the war, emphasizing the Confederate navy's integral role in Confederate plans to gain independence in 1864. While the cruise of the *Tallahassee* represented part of a larger Confederate objective to secure independence, the outcome of an initially successful cruise exposed serious problems for the Confederacy. Those results will be analyzed in this study, as will the negligible effect the cruise had upon British interests during the Civil War.

The architect of the August 1864 cruise of the CSS *Tallahassee*, John Taylor Wood, has received little scholarly attention. Royce Shingleton provided the best scholarly biography of Wood in *John Taylor Wood: Sea Ghost of the Confederacy*. Shingleton's biography devoted

most of its attention to Wood's Civil War career. Shingleton failed to address adequately the larger issues at play during Wood's cruise in 1864. The ties between military and political objectives are rarely mentioned in his study. Other biographers include Arthur Thurston, whose work contained some faulty information and who was an unabashed Wood admirer, and John Bell, whose brief monograph focused more on Wood's life after the Civil War. Bell, a Canadian archivist, offered a significant contribution by compiling a list of Wood's writings and a comprehensive bibliography.¹² That Wood died before completing his memoir perhaps accounts for the fact that the Confederate naval officer has yet to reap much serious scholarly attention. Other Civil War naval officers secured their legacies by writing of their waterborne exploits. Wood contributed several articles to the large canon of accounts by Civil War participants but never completed his memoir.¹³

Similarly, the August 1864 cruise of the CSS *Tallahassee* itself has largely been neglected or dismissed by historians of the Civil War navies. The importance of the cruise has been lost over time. Placing the cruise of the *Tallahassee* in a larger context leads to a better understanding of the direction of Confederate naval policy in 1864, the advocacy among a cadre

¹² Shingleton, *Sea Ghost*, 116-144; Arthur Thurston, *Arthur Thurston's Tallahassee Skipper: The Biography of John Taylor Wood, Merrimac Gunner, Soldier-at-Sea, Guardian of the Confederate Treasury, Adopted Nova Scotian* (Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, 1981); John Bell, *Confederate Seadog: John Taylor Wood in War and Exile* (Jefferson, North Carolina, 2002). Credit is due to Royce Shingleton, who piqued the writer's interest in the connection of the *Tallahassee* to the greater picture of the war. Shingleton raised the issue but did not adequately explain the connection between politics, the navy, and the Confederate offensive of 1864. See Shingleton, *Sea Ghost*, 121, 127-128.

¹³ Wood's incomplete memoir, only thirty-five pages in length and covering the sailor's formative years, were found in his office after his death in 1904. See Bell, *Confederate Seadog*, 153 and 151-153 for a complete listing of Wood's writings. Other important memoirs of Confederate naval officers include Raphael Semmes, *Memoirs of Service Afloat During the War Between the States* (Baltimore, 1869); Emma Martin Maffitt, *The Life and Services of John Newland Maffitt* (New York, 1906); James I. Waddell and James D. Horan, ed., *C.S.S. Shenandoah: The Memoirs of Lieutenant Commanding James I. Waddell* (New York, 1960); John McIntosh Kell, *Recollections of a Naval Life including the Cruises of the Confederate States Steamers "Sumter" and "Alabama"* (Washington, D.C., 1900); J. Wilkinson, *The Narrative of a Blockade Runner* (New York, 1877); and James D. Bulloch, *The Secret Service of the Confederate States in Europe, or, How the Confederate Cruisers were Equipped* 2 vols. (New York, 1884; reprint, New York, 1959). These memoirs are instructive for the historian studying naval affairs. Casting aside the polemics of Reconstruction and the particular venom reserved for the Northern government during the Civil War, one can better understand life at sea. For a most useful account of a Northern naval officer, see David D. Porter, *The Naval History of the Civil War* (New York, 1886; reprint, Secaucus, New Jersey, 1984).

of Confederate policymakers of offensive warfare to obtain peace and independence, the adverse effect of this offensive warfare on the Confederacy, the importance of a popular mandate in carrying out military policies, and the character of formal Anglo-Confederate relations by the summer of 1864. John Taylor Wood recounted his experiences at the helm of the raider in “The *Tallahassee*’s Dash into New York Waters” for *The Century Magazine* in 1898. This article serves as the groundwork for all studies of the commerce raiding mission. Ironically, Wood, always an offensive combatant, was much more of a defensive writer. Wood’s detailed account of the cruise must be viewed with some reservation. During the Civil War, the Federal government defined Confederate commerce raiders as pirates, practicing partisan warfare on behalf of a government Lincoln and his colleagues refused to recognize as a belligerent nation. Wood defended his controversial actions in the *Century Magazine* article, arguing that his vessel was a legitimate ship of war armed in a Confederate port, and that he closely followed international rules of war. Most scholars have agreed with Wood’s assertion that the *Tallahassee* was “as legally a cruiser as was General Lee’s force an army,” but serious research into Wood’s cruise unearths some actions that were questionable. Wood’s article painted the picture of a fair-minded raider, pained by the duty that he must carry out for his government. Wood, though, challenged the provisions of neutrality and used the flag of the United States to lure his victims. He excused his actions with stories of the kind treatment afforded his prisoners while aboard the *Tallahassee*. The fact that Wood’s article was written about the same time that he applied for amnesty with the United States government should be considered.¹⁴

The vast literature of the American Civil War is frustrating to the student of the Civil War navies. Naval historians have argued vehemently that their field has not received the attention it

¹⁴ John Taylor Wood, “The *Tallahassee*’s Dash into New York Waters,” *The Century Magazine* 56, no. 3 (July 1898): 416.

deserves. As early as 1886, Admiral David Dixon Porter, an important participant in Union naval matters, expressed his concerns in *The Naval History of the Civil War*. “[W]hile the country has been lavish of its praise of the Army, it has not always rendered that justice to the Navy which it actually deserved,” Porter reasoned. The admiral’s observation has been partially remedied in the last thirty years, as historians have produced excellent studies of various aspects of the Civil War at sea. Still, Civil War naval historians have treated the August 1864 cruise of the CSS *Tallahassee* as something of a footnote – a fine example of Confederate commerce raiding but little more than an isolated event.¹⁵

Commerce raiding was born of necessity for the Confederacy. Dismissed as piracy by most Northern observers and policymakers, commerce raiding involved converting fast steamships into warships to attack the merchant marine of the Union. The policy, formulated by Confederate Secretary of the Navy Stephen Mallory, was designed to accomplish several objectives. Abraham Lincoln proclaimed a blockade of the seceded states on April 19, 1861, in the hopes of suffocating the South and cutting a vital source of munitions and supplies. In Lincoln’s view the severance of the South’s maritime supply line would bring the wayward states back into the Union. Instead, a lucrative blockade running trade emerged, earning huge profits for those bold enough to undertake such risky missions and helping to keep the Confederacy equipped well enough to continue the fight for four years. Stephen Mallory hoped that commerce raiders, purchased and built in Europe and equipped in neutral ports, would distract Federal cruisers from the blockade, allowing blockade runners easier access to

¹⁵ Porter, *The Naval History of the Civil War*, 21. An excellent, recent collection of essays dealing with the historiography of the American Civil War gave short shrift to the navies of the Union and Confederacy. See James M. McPherson and William J. Cooper, Jr., eds., *Writing the Civil War: The Quest to Understand* (Columbia, South Carolina, 1998). It should be noted that essays by Gary W. Gallagher and Emory M. Thomas make mention of both the Federal and Confederate navies with regard to Northern and Southern military strategy and policy, yet both scholars downplayed the importance of the navies.

Confederate ports. Protests arose from those associated with the United States merchant marine, as they worried that their means of survival were in danger as long as Confederate raiders prowled the sea. Under the terms of international maritime law, a blockade had to be effective for it to be legal. Mallory hoped that the activities of the raiders would hamper the effectiveness of the Federal blockade and help the Confederacy in the arena of foreign relations. If the Confederacy could demonstrate that the Federal blockade was ineffective, it might gain recognition as a sovereign nation by European powers. Mallory and other Confederate leaders were inspired by French recognition of the United States during the American Revolution. Finally, Mallory hoped for the commerce raiders to stir up trouble, increasing marine insurance rates and forcing American shippers to transfer their registers to neutral nations for protection, and to have an adverse effect on Northern morale. Such goals have long been addressed in studies of the most famous Confederate commerce raiders, the CSS *Alabama* and the CSS *Florida*, which wreaked havoc on the Northern merchant marine and excited the interest of observers in both North America and Europe.¹⁶

Viewing the cruise of the *Tallahassee* through the traditional lens of commerce raiding is problematic, though. The *Tallahassee*'s cruise was unique for several reasons. The vessel was equipped not in a neutral port, but in the Confederate port of Wilmington, North Carolina. By August 1864 United States diplomats in Europe curtailed the construction and fitting out of

¹⁶ James McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York, 2001), 195-197. The best study of blockade running in the Confederacy is Stephen R. Wise, *Lifeline of the Confederacy: Blockade Running During the Civil War* (Columbia, South Carolina, 1988). Historians have come to a consensus that the Confederacy was in fact adequately supplied. See Richard E. Beringer, Herman Hattaway, Archer Jones, and William N. Still, Jr., *Why the South Lost the Civil War* (Athens, Georgia, 1986), 9. Mallory's commerce raiding goals are elucidated in Raimondo Luraghi, *A History of the Confederate Navy* (Annapolis, Maryland, 1996), 66-87. The importance of the navy and foreign affairs is the focus of a few studies, including Frank L. Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy: Foreign Relations of the Confederate States of America*, 2nd edition (Chicago, 1931; Chicago, 1959); Frank J. Merli, *Great Britain and the Confederate Navy, 1861-1865* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1970); Warren F. Spencer, *The Confederate Navy in Europe* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama, 1983); and Howard Jones, *Union in Peril: The Crisis over British Intervention in the Civil War* (Chapel Hill, 1992). A great deal of literature exists on the cruises of the CSS *Florida* and the CSS *Alabama*, but this literature offers little insight into the cruise of the CSS *Tallahassee*.

Confederate cruisers. The efforts of James Dunwoody Bulloch, head of the Confederate Navy in Europe, were for the most part stymied. British authorities feared that their dominance of the world's oceans could be compromised at a later date if they abandoned their neutral stance in the American war. Not wanting to set a precedent that could endanger their naval supremacy, many British authorities begged shipbuilders to refrain from interacting with Bulloch and his agents. Questions about the legality of procuring Confederate raiders such as the *Alabama* and *Florida* in England, coupled with the amount of destruction wrought by the two vessels, led the British to back away from Confederate overtures to obtain additional raiders. The French were unwilling to act without the British, and the other European powers kept their distance from Bulloch. The Confederacy was forced to look elsewhere for ships to serve as commerce raiders. The *Tallahassee*, therefore, was a converted blockade runner, armed in a home port of the Confederacy, although lacking the major firepower of its raiding forebears.¹⁷

The cruise of the *Tallahassee* was designed with more than the traditional objectives of Confederate commerce raiders in mind. The evidence suggests that the cruise of the *Tallahassee* was part of a Confederate offensive designed to influence the Northern electorate in the months leading up to the Federal elections in November 1864. By the summer of 1864, hopes of securing independence for the Confederacy were based largely on convincing the Northern public that continuing the war was a fruitless endeavor. As long as pressure could be placed upon the people of the North, the feeling prevailed among Southern nationalists that independence was readily attainable. John Taylor Wood, himself so much a Southern nationalist that he refused to live under what he saw as an oppressive United States government after the war, fell into this camp. Working closely with Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee, Wood first

¹⁷ See Bulloch, *Secret Service*, especially volume 2; Merli, *Great Britain and the Confederate Navy*; and Spencer, *The Confederate Navy in Europe* for in depth analysis of the interaction of Confederate naval agents with the powers in Europe.

plotted a prison break at Point Lookout, Maryland in tandem with Jubal Early's July 1864 raid on Washington, D.C. The scheme failed as its secrecy was compromised, prompting Wood to turn to commerce raiding as a means of taking the war to the North. Southern policymakers believed that Lincoln's reelection would hinder the prospects for Confederate independence. These policymakers hoped that the combined offensive could relieve the beleaguered Southern home front, help fuel the ever-growing dismay with Lincoln, and result in the election of a candidate more likely to support a cessation of hostilities. If that task were accomplished, Southern leaders reasoned that Confederate independence would follow. Davis and Wood accurately gauged the tenor of Northern popular opinion during the summer of 1864, yet the cruise of the *Tallahassee* probably deflected Northern disaffection from Lincoln after news of a Federal victory at Atlanta reached the people in early September 1864. The hostility aimed at Lincoln was refocused upon the South, rekindling the call to subjugate the Confederates, who seemed to advocate piracy.¹⁸

The cruise of the *Tallahassee* combined both military and political objectives and must be viewed in that light. It cannot be dismissed as a mere exercise in vengeance as historian Bern Anderson argued. August 1864 offered ample opportunity for John Taylor Wood to strike the coast of New York and New England, bringing the war to the doorsteps of residents far away from the battlefield. In addition to the traditional aims of relieving the blockade at Wilmington

¹⁸ Traditional studies of Confederate commerce raiding often failed to make the connection between the *Tallahassee* and political objectives. Viewing the cruise through the traditional paradigm lessens both the exceptionalism and deleterious effect of the *Tallahassee*'s cruise. For traditional takes on the cruise of the *Tallahassee*, see James Russell Soley, *The Blockade and the Cruisers* (New York, 1887; reprint, Wilmington, North Carolina, 1989); J. Thomas Scharf, *History of the Confederate Navy from Its Organization to the Surrender of Its Last Vessel*, 2 vols. (New York, 1887; reprint, Freeport, New York, 1969); William Morrison Robinson, Jr., *The Confederate Privateers* (New Haven, Connecticut, 1928); Richard S. West, Jr., *Mr. Lincoln's Navy* (Westport, Connecticut, 1957); Virgil Carrington Jones, *The Civil War at Sea*, 3 vols. (New York, 1960-1962); and Bern Anderson, *By Sea and By River: The Naval History of the Civil War* (New York, 1962). James D. Horan argued that the *Tallahassee* was to be used as part of a Southern terror campaign preceding the election of 1864, shelling towns along the coast of Maine, but gives little insight as to how the vessel fit into the scheme. See Horan, *Confederate Agent: A Discovery in History* (New York, 1954), 113-116 for an interesting, if unconvincing, account.

and forcing more vessels to adopt neutral flags, John Taylor Wood hoped to generate anxiety among the people of the Northeast. This offensive commerce destruction was to serve as an ultimatum to the people of the Northeast – support the war and face the prospect of continued destruction or call for a cessation of hostilities.¹⁹

John Taylor Wood and the August 1864 cruise of the CSS *Tallahassee* have received more attention in specialized studies of the Confederate navy, yet the full story of the cruise has not been told until now. Historians such as Tom Henderson Wells and Raimondo Luraghi commended Wood's war record and his abilities as both an aide to president Jefferson Davis and as a naval commander. In *The Confederate Navy: A Study in Organization* Wells argued that Confederate commerce raiding as a whole was impressive, but hardly worth the costs, resources, or the diplomatic leverage consumed. Wells failed to differentiate the cruise of the *Tallahassee* from other commerce raiders and did not analyze why the *Tallahassee's* cruise was undertaken. Raimondo Luraghi's *A History of the Confederate Navy* took a different viewpoint but still did not adequately analyze the cause and effects of the *Tallahassee's* activities. Like Wells, Luraghi was impressed by the efforts of commerce raiders. He viewed the commerce raiders as successful, arguing that the Federal navy did not have the capabilities to simultaneously maintain a blockade as well as protect the United States merchant marine from Confederate raiders. Luraghi differentiated the *Tallahassee* from other raiders because of its design and former life as a blockade runner, but failed to grasp the long term effects of the *Tallahassee's* cruise. That army commanders and civil authorities in Wilmington complained that the *Tallahassee* actually increased the strength of the Federal blockade seems to be lost on many naval historians.

¹⁹ Anderson, *By Sea and By River*, 211-214.

Placing the *Tallahassee* in a larger context than just the war at sea helps to determine the effects of the cruise.²⁰

Too often, naval historians have looked at naval affairs in a vacuum, failing to understand or qualify the larger political objectives and repercussions of naval events. The August 1864 cruise of the CSS *Tallahassee* lends credence to this argument. Historians have viewed the cruise as just another example of commerce raiding, if they have considered it at all. Chester Hearn's study of Confederate raiders devoted only 13 of 309 pages of text to the CSS *Tallahassee*.²¹ Was the August 1864 raid a miniscule part of the Confederate war effort?

In fact, the cruise of the CSS *Tallahassee* is crucial to understanding larger questions involved in the war. The waterborne operation must be viewed through several lenses to gauge accurately its importance. The traditional interpretation of naval operations and Confederate commerce raiding is useful in that it illuminates the obvious objectives of the cruise, namely to weaken the blockade and cause the United States Navy Department headaches in trying to locate the vessel. One must also interpret the reaction to the cruise throughout the North. Flustered by the floundering Union war effort, a growing contingent of Northerners looked for alternatives to fighting the Confederacy, and some actually endorsed letting the South go in peace. In order to better understand the motivations of the cruise, and, for a time, its success, one must assess how the North reacted to the cruise. There is a surprisingly limited number of studies on Confederate

²⁰ Tom Henderson Wells, *The Confederate Navy: A Study in Organization* (University, Alabama, 1971), 129; Luraghi, *History of the Confederate Navy*, 348. For the best study on the blockade around Wilmington, see Robert M. Browning, Jr., *From Cape Charles to Cape Fear: The North Atlantic Blockading Squadron During the Civil War* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama, 1993).

²¹ Chester G. Hearn, *Gray Raiders of the Sea: How Eight Confederate Warships Destroyed the Union's High Seas Commerce* (Camden, Maine, 1992), 129-141.

policy regarding the United States presidential election of 1864, with little emphasis placed on the role of the navy. This study will attempt to bridge that gap.²²

Additionally, the long-term implications of the *Tallahassee*'s cruise have not been adequately studied. The raid highlighted some of the larger problems of the Confederate war effort. The *Tallahassee*'s sojourn in the British-controlled port of Halifax, Nova Scotia lent credence to the notion among some Confederate leaders that by the summer of 1864 the British could not be counted upon for explicit support. That the colonial government in Halifax rebuffed Wood's attempt to secure a stay in port for a duration longer than stipulated in neutrality provisions demonstrated that the tie between the Confederacy and Great Britain was all but severed. Even more evident was the belief among several Confederate naval officials that victory at sea was the only way to attain independence and recognition. In their view, diplomacy rode the coattails of naval power.²³

The cruise resulted in political backbiting and disagreements among President Jefferson Davis, North Carolina Governor Zebulon Vance, and Confederate army and navy leaders. Local and state authorities complained that the efforts of raiders like the *Tallahassee* would spell doom for Wilmington, the last major Confederate seaport open to trade with the outside world. Some five months after the cruise Fort Fisher did indeed fall, and Wilmington was closed by Federal

²² The best study of this policy is Larry E. Nelson, *Bullets, Ballots, and Rhetoric: Confederate Policy for the United States Presidential Contest of 1864* (University, Alabama, 1980). See also David E. Long, " 'I Say We Can Control That Election:' Confederate Policy Towards the 1864 U.S. Presidential Election," *Lincoln Herald* 99, No. 3 (Fall 1997): 111-129.

²³ Mary Elizabeth Thomas termed the cruise of the *Tallahassee* a "factor in Anglo-American relations." This writer agrees that the cruise was a factor in the relationship between the United States and Great Britain, albeit a small one. What Thomas did not fully develop in her article is that the cruise of the *Tallahassee* was such a non-factor in *Confederate-Anglo* relations. The belief among some Southerners that the Palmerston government was sympathetic to the Confederacy was largely an illusion, and the actions of the colonial government affirmed this fact. Wood did not anticipate that the cruise of the *Tallahassee* would alter Confederate-Anglo diplomacy. He believed that the people of Halifax were already pro-Confederate and that the colonial government would grant him an extended stay in port to refit the *Tallahassee*. That the colonial government did not pander to Wood's request proved that, although many citizens in Halifax may have sided with the Confederacy, official British decorum would not allow for a breach in neutrality. See Mary Elizabeth Thomas, "The CSS *Tallahassee*: A Factor in Anglo-American Relations, 1864-1866," *Civil War History* 21, No. 2 (June 1975): 148-159; Johnson, "Davis and Lincoln," 62.

forces. Was the *Tallahassee* to blame? Was it a reason for Confederate defeat? These questions will be addressed in this monograph by looking at the impact of the cruise not just on the Confederate navy but on the entire Confederate war effort. Also, what impact did the cruise have on its commander, John Taylor Wood? The grandson of a United States President and nephew of Jefferson Davis, Wood remains a rather obscure character in the Civil War.

“Miserable business is war, ashore or afloat,” Wood wrote some years after the war.²⁴ Through this study the writer hopes to provide a better understanding of the miserable business of the Civil War by combining traditional approaches to naval history with those of political and diplomatic history.

²⁴ Wood, “*Tallahassee’s* Dash,” 413.

CHAPTER TWO-MOTIVATIONS

Confederate plans to unleash a commerce raider on the northeastern seaboard of the United States were not hatched overnight. The plot came to fruition over time, as a result of a number of factors. President Jefferson Davis gave his nephew John Taylor Wood the go-ahead in August 1864, after the failure of good-faith negotiations with the Lincoln government over the issue of Confederate independence. Throughout 1864 Davis and his emissaries initiated a dialogue with Lincoln about ending the protracted war and recognizing the sovereignty of the Confederate States of America. Lincoln refused to recognize the legitimacy of the Confederate government and made it his official policy not to enter into discussion with Richmond.

The cruise of the *Tallahassee* was also the culmination of a series of efforts by the Davis administration to again take the war to the North, this time by water. Davis and Wood hoped to strike fear in the hearts of a portion of the Northern populace yet to experience war directly. This plan escalated in the summer of 1864, as the United States presidential election loomed on the horizon. In a military sense, the strategy was devised to alleviate the pressure of Northern forces on the South. Confederate military advisors hoped that offensive warfare in the North would relieve the tightened grip around key areas, especially Richmond and Wilmington. The cruise planned by John Taylor Wood was not purely an exercise in desperation, but rather a coordinated attempt to wreak havoc along the coast of the United States and thereby influence the electoral process. In addition to drawing blockaders away from Wilmington, peace and recognition of the Confederacy were motivating factors for the mission.

In a letter to North Carolina Governor Zebulon Vance dated January 8, 1864, President Davis expressed his frustration in attempting to broker peace with the United States. The chief

executive lamented that he had made three entreaties to the Lincoln administration, with each appeal meeting rejection. “To attempt again to send commissioners or agents to propose peace, is to invite insult and contumely,” Davis snapped, “and to subject ourselves to indignity without the slightest chance of being listened to.”¹

An ill-fated July 1863 mission by Confederate Vice-President Alexander Stephens marked an important episode in the war. He was ostensibly sent to discuss a prisoner exchange cartel, but his true intention was to negotiate a peace treaty. Through Stephens, Davis indicated that the Union army was targeting Southern noncombatants and personal property. The Confederate president pointed out that he had not retaliated “because of its obvious tendency to lead to a war of indiscriminate massacre on each side.” Davis’s communication indicated that this would be the “one last solemn attempt to avert such calamities.”² After being rebuffed by the Lincoln administration, Davis resolved that the only way to bring about peace was to broaden the scope of the war.

Distressed by Lincoln’s refusal to hear Confederate terms, Davis viewed his task as commander-in-chief with a singular vision. In his view the military was the most important instrument to secure Confederate independence. Although a growing faction of Confederate congressmen, newspaper editors, and civilians desired reunion with the United States, the Mississippian would consider nothing less than an independent Confederate States of America. By early 1864 Davis recognized that negotiations were pointless. The way to gain independence was through military force.³

¹ Jefferson Davis to Zebulon B. Vance, January 8, 1864, Lynda Lasswell Crist, ed., *The Papers of Jefferson Davis* (hereafter cited as *PJD*), 11 vols. to date (Baton Rouge, 1971-2003), 10: 158-163.

² Jefferson Davis to Abraham Lincoln, July 2, 1863, James D. Richardson, ed., *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Confederacy including the Diplomatic Correspondence, 1861-1865*, 2 vols. (Nashville, 1905), 1: 343-344, hereinafter cited as *Messages and Papers Confederacy*.

³ Paul D. Escott argues that the Davis administration was given two choices in 1864: obtain favorable peace terms and reenter the Union because of Northern discontent with the war, or gain independence by convincing the United

The year 1864 was a watershed in the conflict. From the outset of fighting in 1861, romantic notions of battle gave way to the grim, destructive realities of warfare. Most Americans believed early on that the war would be over after one or two battles. They envisioned a war in which each side fought honorably and nobly. Northerners thought reasonable Southerners would quickly realize the error of secession and press for reunion. Southerners, on the other hand, calculated that a strong military buildup would demonstrate that they could not be conquered. In the minds of many Southerners, “Yankees” lacked the resolve to wage a prolonged war and would eventually let the South go its own way.⁴

It did not take long for such perceptions on both sides to diminish. By 1863 casualties had far surpassed expectations and continued to mount with each successive battle. Wounded soldiers staggered through the streets of cities both North and South and citizens complained of destruction to their property. The depredations and suffering of the war reached levels never before imagined.⁵

Davis’s decision in 1864 to reject diplomacy with the North and move ahead with a renewed military offensive was founded upon several factors. Davis fully appreciated how destructive the war had become. Regardless of the reports of suffering and tragedy, Davis concluded that the war must be rigorously prosecuted. In October 1863, while on an inspection tour of the Army of Tennessee after vicious fighting at Chickamauga, Davis observed that soldiers suffered from “half-rations, thin blankets, ragged clothes, and shoeless feet.” Although

States people that victory over the Confederacy was not possible. Escott sees Davis as stubborn, unable to understand that the will of the Confederate populace was weak. In Escott’s eyes, Davis made the wrong choice, opting for independence rather than peace and reunion. See his *After Secession: Jefferson Davis and the Failure of Confederate Nationalism* (Baton Rouge, 1978), 196-198.

⁴ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 312-338. The correspondence of Union and Confederate soldiers offers an interesting glimpse to the changing nature of the war and their coming to terms with the grim realities of war. See Reid Mitchell, *The Vacant Chair: The Northern Soldier Leaves Home* (New York, 1993), 3-18 and James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York, 1997), 30-45.

⁵ Charles Royster, *The Destructive War: William Tecumseh Sherman, Stonewall Jackson, and the Americans* (New York, 1991), 79-82.

hardened by both an imperfect supply system and relentless Federal attacks, Davis told his soldiers that he was confident of eventual victory.⁶ Despite setbacks, both on the military front and on the home front, Davis truly believed that independence could still be gained with victories on the battlefield and at sea. The sufferings of war were the price the Confederacy must pay for victory.

Resolve on the battlefield, Davis believed, would directly affect the political climate of the North. If Northerners became convinced that the South would not surrender under any circumstances, independence would be granted. Confederate Secretary of the Navy Stephen Mallory shared Davis's opinion that independence would be costly. While Davis constantly shuffled members of his cabinet, Mallory remained at his post for the duration of the war. The two men did not always see eye-to-eye on all policies, but the navy secretary agreed that a show of force would be the most effective way to win the war. "We must endure much suffering," Mallory wrote to his wife, "ere we win our independence, & we must present to the foe an undying resolve to conquer or to die."⁷ That resolve was integrated into a military strategy in 1864 designed to affect the upcoming Federal presidential election. The plan involved not only the Confederate army but the Confederate navy as well. Davis and his advisors decided to take the war back to the people of the North, as had been done in 1862 and 1863, hoping that the growing disaffection would push Lincoln and the Republicans out of office. In Davis's mind, the election of a peace candidate in the North meant a far greater chance for Confederate independence.

Northern politics preoccupied Davis. A former Democratic senator from Mississippi, the Confederate president was familiar with many of the Congressmen and key government figures

⁶ Speech at Missionary Ridge, October 10, 1863, *PJD*, 10: 20-22.

⁷ Stephen R. Mallory to Wife, May 4, 1862, Stephen R. Mallory Papers (microfilm), Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, hereinafter cited as Mallory Papers, SHC.

in Washington. He constantly read Northern newspapers to monitor the political climate and military affairs.⁸ As United States casualties mounted throughout 1864, Lincoln's chances for reelection dimmed. Davis was convinced that Lincoln's defeat would help the Confederacy's bid for independence. The perceptive Lincoln summed up the 1864 election as a "contest between a Union and a Disunion candidate." Davis and Lincoln seemed to agree that a victory by a Peace candidate meant the permanent fracture of the United States and would result in Confederate sovereignty. "The issue is a mighty one for all people and all time," Lincoln declared, "and whoever aids the right will be appreciated and remembered."⁹

Davis, on the other hand, could not sit idly by without attempting to influence the election. The chance to combine military and political objectives was too tempting to let pass. Not all Southerners agreed that military force was the best way to attain independence, however. A strong anti-Davis faction had emerged during the war that included Georgia governor Joseph Brown, Georgia senator Herschel Johnson, and Texas senator Louis Wigfall. These men and others disagreed with several of Davis's domestic as well as military policies.¹⁰ Johnson voiced his disagreement with the military policy advocated by Davis in January 1864. Like Davis, Johnson sensed a "very strong hostility to Lincoln" in the North, and believed that if he were defeated the war would end and the Confederacy would likely obtain its independence. At the same time, Johnson did not advocate increased military pressure on the North. He called for secret agents to organize covert operations out of Canada to foster opposition to Lincoln by

⁸ For example, see Davis to John Taylor Wood, July 11, 1864, *The War of the Rebellion, A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (hereafter cited as *OR*), 70 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1880-1901), series 2, 7: 458. It is well known that Confederate General Robert E. Lee often read Northern newspapers and considered them when making strategic decisions. Many of his communications to Davis would include excerpts from Northern newspapers for the president to read. For an example, see Lee to Davis, April 30, 1864, *OR*, series 1, 33: 1331-1332.

⁹ Lincoln to Abram Wakeman, July 25, 1864, *CWL* 7: 461.

¹⁰ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 691-694; Beringer, et. al., *Why the South Lost the Civil War*, 288-289; and James Z. Rabun, "Alexander H. Stephens and Jefferson Davis," *The American Historical Review* 58, No. 2 (January 1953): 290-321.

infiltrating northern cities and provoking riots. “The sword will scarcely end this war,” Johnson declared, adding, “The *pen* & not the *sword* will bring peace at last.”¹¹

Indeed, Davis accepted Johnson’s recommendations and later dispatched agents to Canada. This decision, however, did not lessen Davis’s determination to proceed with his military plans. In fact, the agents ended up being a mere sideshow to the efforts of the Confederate armed forces to disrupt Lincoln’s reelection campaign.¹²

Some Southern newspaper editors vested little faith in Davis’s plan. They realized that Lincoln faced mounting opposition in the upcoming election but remained adamant that no Northern politician, whether bent on peace or prosecution of the war, would grant the Confederate States of America its independence. “The accession of a conservative Democrat, like [George B.] McClellan,” claimed one writer, “would do infinitely more to paralyze the South and build up a reconstruction party in our midst.” He went on to say that the captures of Richmond and Atlanta would mean reelection for Lincoln. Reminding his readers that whoever was elected in the North would still be the enemy, the editor asked, “What Northern statesman has breached an assurance that he would stop the war and recognize the South, if in his power?”¹³

Military operations in the summer of 1864 stood to have a tremendous impact on the upcoming election Federal presidential election. The Army of the Potomac, commanded by

¹¹ Herschel V. Johnson to Davis, January 4, 1864, *PJD* 10: 152-153.

¹² Much is owed to the aforementioned groundbreaking study of Confederate policy toward the election, *Bullets, Ballots, and Rhetoric*. This writer disagrees with Nelson’s contention that the agents in Canada represented the crucial part of Confederate plans to influence the election. As Nelson argued, Davis realized their importance, but in reality military action was the primary method Davis advocated and employed. The shady nature of the operatives, whose plans included inciting riots in Northern cities and undertaking a campaign of terror, made their actions questionable from the start. They probably did more damage than good to the peace effort. Even if Atlanta had not fallen in 1864, this writer doubts that the agents could have done enough to change the results of the presidential election. The results were due to the military situation that Davis tried to shape through his military policies. For Nelson’s argument, see *Bullets, Ballots, and Rhetoric*, 18-30, 167-175.

¹³ Correspondence of the *Atlanta Appeal*, July 7, 1864, reprinted in *The New York Times*, July 29, 1864.

General Ulysses S. Grant, was bogged down in a stalemate against Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia at Petersburg, Virginia. In Georgia, General William T. Sherman struggled to drive the Confederates out of Atlanta. Confederate forces were expending great energy and resources to defend both Richmond and Atlanta. One gray-clad soldier tucked away in a ditch at Petersburg revealed the dark reality of trench warfare: "We are about 5 or 6 hundred yards from the yanks entrenchments." The Confederate soldier confessed that he hoped the war of attrition at Petersburg would soon give way to peace. As a veteran, he knew the grim reality of war, writing, "I don't know when the fight will come off it may be in a few days or it may be some time or it may not be at all."¹⁴

Unconvinced that both the Union army and navy were grinding the Southern war machine down, a growing contingent of Northerners were concerned about the progress of the war. Even Southerners recognized the discontent. "The [New York] *World* declaims [Grant's] whole campaign a disastrous failure and declares the opinion that Richmond and Petersburg cannot be taken," a Confederate official observed. A committed Lincoln supporter in the North alleged that not only Copperheads were questioning Lincoln's policies and his management of the war, but "truly loyal men with weak backbones" as well.¹⁵

Confederate leaders understood the potential benefits of an assault on Washington. Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee hoped to ease the pressure on Lee's army at Petersburg, harass Union supporters in Maryland, and stoke anti-Lincoln sentiment. An imposing network of forts and batteries protected Washington, but the troops left to man the defenses were untested in battle. The Federals deployed veteran troops to the battlefronts in Virginia and Georgia. A

¹⁴ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 754-756; Orren Phillips to Father & Mother, May 27, 1864, Jessie Phillips Papers, Perkins Library, Duke University.

¹⁵ Diary entry of August 7, 1864 in Edward Younger, ed., *Inside the Confederate Government: The Diary of Robert Garlick Hill Kean* (New York, 1957), 168-169; Diary entry of July 23, 1864, Strong, *Diary of the Civil War*, 467.

rapid advance by a Confederate force would threaten Washington before Grant could dispatch troops from his operational army to defend the city. Soldiers would surely have to be removed from the Petersburg entrenchments to protect the seat of the Federal government, thus relieving pressure on Richmond and Lee's beleaguered army. Moreover, there remained the possibility that an effective demonstration would result in foreign recognition of the Confederacy, a diplomatic initiative that overseas envoys had vainly attempted to obtain since the inception of the nascent nation in 1861. Surely, thought Rebel leaders, the capture of the United States capital would demonstrate to Europe and the North that the Confederacy could not be conquered. A vote for Lincoln in the upcoming elections, therefore, would mean more flesh thrown upon a heap of futility. To obtain peace, another candidate must be elected in November 1864.¹⁶

Davis and Lee's plan called for dispatching a portion of the Army of Northern Virginia, led by Lieutenant General Jubal Early, to advance on Washington by way of the Shenandoah Valley in western Virginia. Lee gave Early the discretion to move across the Potomac River and threaten Washington if the subordinate thought that could be accomplished. In Lee's estimation Early's troops were vital to the protection of Richmond, as success by them would "relieve our difficulties that at present press heavily upon us." It was also hoped that supplies and sustenance might be secured in the Shenandoah Valley for the Army of Northern Virginia.¹⁷

Early and his troops crossed the Potomac River in early July and won a victory over Major General Lew Wallace at Monocacy on July 9, 1864. Confederate intelligence had been correct: green troops and aged home guard units garrisoned the defenses around Washington. For a time the situation appeared so dire that Gideon Welles offered to send sailors from the

¹⁶ Frank E. Vandiver, *Jubal's Raid: General Early's Famous Attack on Washington in 1864* (New York, 1960), 138-140, 142-143, 164; Frank L. Klement, *The Copperheads in the Middle West* (Chicago, 1960), 232-233.

¹⁷ Lee to Davis, June 14, 1864, Douglas Southall Freeman, ed., *Lee's Dispatches: Unpublished Letters of General Robert E. Lee, C.S.A., to Jefferson Davis and the War Department of the Confederate States of America, 1862-1865* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1957), 226-232; Lee to Davis, June 26, 1864, *OR*, series 1, 37, part 1: 766-767.

Washington Navy Yard to man the defenses surrounding Washington. A concerned Lincoln wired Grant, asking him to personally lead troops to the capital to stave off the approaching Confederates. Fear of a Confederate invasion swept through Washington and rumors floated through the streets about the size of the approaching force. It was believed that General James Longstreet was at the head of a corps of troops in addition to Jubal Early's forces.¹⁸

Citizens of Baltimore grew fearful that the Confederates would strike their city after the attack on Washington. However, Early targeted only Washington as his forces reached the city's outer defenses on July 11. To the relief of Lincoln and Washingtonians, Federal reinforcements from the Army of the Potomac arrived that same day. Although not commanded by Grant as Lincoln had requested, the presence of battle-hardened soldiers convinced Early that an attack on the city would be futile and might even ruin his army. On July 12 Early called off the invasion, opting to live to fight another day. Although he did not capture Washington, Early's raid reaped benefits for the Confederacy. Vital supplies were procured in the Shenandoah Valley, Grant was forced to detach a portion of his operational armies besieging Petersburg and Richmond, and public dismay with Lincoln's management of the war increased. "The *National Intelligencer* comments with a good deal of truth and ability on our national humiliation," a disappointed Gideon Welles confided to his diary. "There is no getting away from the statements and facts presented."¹⁹

More statements and facts trickled into the Federal capital over the next few days. The bullet that Lincoln and his government had dodged might well have been more lethal than first

¹⁸ Vandiver, *Jubal's Raid*, 103-112; Welles to Commodore J.B. Montgomery, July 12, 1864, *OR*, series 1, 37, part 2: 224; Lincoln to Grant, July 10, 1864, *CWL* 7: 437; Lincoln to Grant, July 12, 1864, *CWL* 7: 438.

¹⁹ Long, *Civil War Day by Day*, 537; Vandiver, *Jubal's Raid*, 152-165, 173-174; diary entry of July 15, 1864, Howard K. Beale, ed., *Diary of Gideon Welles*, 3 vols. (New York, 1960), 2: 77.

thought. As it turned out, part of the Confederate offensive had also included a joint army-navy expedition on the shores of Maryland.

A Federal prison camp where thousands of Confederate captives were held stood at Point Lookout, Maryland. A surprise attack on the prison camp might release the detainees, and properly armed, the prisoners could attack Washington from the east while Early's force struck from the west. General Lee felt that a detachment from Early's army under the guidance of Colonel Bradley T. Johnson would be sufficient to attack Point Lookout with the assistance of the Confederate navy. Based on the contemporary view of black soldiers, Lee calculated that the expedition would require comparatively few men because the prison garrison was comprised of mostly black troops. "I should suppose that the commander of such troops would be poor and feeble," Lee reasoned. The general thought it important that Colonel Johnson, a Marylander, lead troops from his home state who would be familiar with the terrain and would be anxious to end the Federal occupation of their native soil. The naval officer to be selected for the mission would have a tremendous task before him: to run the blockade of a Southern port with vessels laden with provisions to be distributed to the liberated Confederate prisoners, and to avoid any Federal gunboats or cruisers near the landing zone in Maryland. Lee and Davis had one man in mind. "The operations on the river must be confided to an able naval officer," Lee wrote, "who I know will be found in Colonel Wood."²⁰

If any officer in the Confederate navy was qualified for the expedition, it was John Taylor Wood. During the first three years of the Civil War, Wood had established himself as one of the most promising officers in Confederate service. Reflecting Wood's good reputation and

²⁰ Lee to Davis, June 26, 1864, *OR*, series 1, 37, part 1: 766-767.

credibility, a comrade remarked that, by 1864, “his voice is all powerful now in Naval affairs at Richmond.”²¹

John Taylor Wood came from good stock. His mother, Anne Mackall Taylor, was the daughter of former president and Mexican War hero Zachary Taylor. Wood inherited the family’s proud military tradition, but the contradictions that marked the career of his grandfather weighed heavily upon his conscious during the secession crisis. Wood was born in the Iowa Territory, where his father, Major Robert C. Wood was stationed with the United States Army in 1830. Being the son of a career army officer, Wood never spent much time in one place during his youth. He identified himself as a Southerner and called Louisiana his native state, but his commission in the United States Navy after graduating from the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland in 1853 did not allow him to settle in any one place as a young adult. His November 1856 marriage to Lola Mackubin, a Marylander, and the prospects of family life helped him reach his decision to accept a position as an instructor at the Naval Academy.²²

As the crisis of the Union worsened in the late 1850s, Wood struggled with his feelings for both the Union and the South. Along with his family’s military tradition, Wood inherited the family’s ambivalence. A distraught Wood wrangled with the secession crisis and his allegiance in his diary and in his head. Like his grandfather, Wood owned slaves. Unlike his grandfather, the naval professor could not remain loyal to the United States. Wood’s views on nationalism eroded as Northern and Southern politicians failed to reach a compromise over slavery in the late 1850s. With the two sections polarized, Wood’s devotion to the United States waned. Perhaps the strongest influence on Wood during the crisis of the Union was his uncle, Jefferson Davis.

²¹ George Washington Gift to Ellen Shackelford, February 7, 1864, George Washington Gift Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

²² Shingleton, *Sea Ghost*, 4-8; Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York, 2005), 585, 603-605, 616-617; Entry for Nov. 17, 1860, Wood Diary, 1, and Jan. 28, 1861, Apr. 20, 1861 in Wood Diary, 2, Wood Papers, SHC.

Davis had been briefly married to Wood's aunt, Sarah Knox Taylor, before her death in 1835. Wood was only five years old at the time, but he always admired his uncle. The naval professor closely followed the political battles in Washington while teaching at nearby Annapolis. He often rode into the capital to attend congressional debates and spend time with Davis. Wood described his uncle as "the ablest man in the Senate," whose ideology drew him closer to the Southern cause. Wood's younger brother, Robert C. Wood, Jr., followed Davis to the Confederacy in February 1861. Wood, however, did not offer his services to the Confederate navy until September of that year.²³

The decision to proffer his services to the Confederacy had not been an easy one. The Wood family was an *a priori* exhibit of the devastating effect of sectionalism. His father, born in Rhode Island, never wavered in his devotion to the United States during the secession storm. Father and son had been close before the Civil War, but John Taylor Wood's decision to go South led to strained relations between the two for the duration of the war.²⁴ The strong connection between John Taylor Wood and Jefferson Davis closely resembled that of a father and son.

Wood was a sailor during a period of transition in naval warfare in the mid-nineteenth century. There was a steady move from sail to steam and great advances in armorclad and

²³ Entry for Feb. 6, 1860 and Mar. 16, 1860, Wood Diary, 1, Wood Papers, SHC; William C. Davis, *Jefferson Davis: The Man and His Hour* (New York, 1991), 72-75; Shingleton, *Sea Ghost*, 6-8, 19-20. Royce Shingleton correctly argues that Jefferson Davis had a huge impact on Wood's decision to go South. Shingleton notes that "Davis was a southern magnet," yet he argues that the strongest influence on Wood was the decision of the United States Navy not to accept his resignation. It seems more likely, however, that although the refusal of his resignation angered Wood, it did not prompt him to offer his services to the Confederacy immediately. Wood received notice of the refusal in May and did not resolve to leave Maryland until September 1861. His pro-Southern leanings haunted him in his professional capacity and led him to tender his resignation. Those feelings, no doubt harvested by his admiration of Davis, only grew over time. The fact that the United States undertook a policy to coerce the Southern states back into the Union was the deciding factor. Wood determined that he could no longer idly sit by and watch the United States government attack the South.

²⁴ Shingleton, *Sea Ghost*, 2; for the relationship of Wood and his father, see Wood's Diary, 2, entry for May 20, 1861, Wood Papers, SHC.

ordnance technology.²⁵ Wood witnessed these changes firsthand and employed the new technologies himself during the war. Before war's end, he was involved in the first duel between ironclad ships, oversaw naval gun emplacements on the banks of the James River, used steam power to capture ships on the high seas, and practiced the centuries-old tactics of a freebooter in cutting-out expeditions. In the process he made a name for himself in high circles and among the Confederate press.

The bond between Davis and Wood grew stronger as the war progressed. After offering his services to the Confederacy, the former professor was commissioned a lieutenant in the Confederate States Navy and assigned to the CSS *Virginia*, a newly constructed ironclad formerly known as the USS *Merrimac*. The young lieutenant commanded a gun crew in the vessel during her fateful encounter with the USS *Monitor* at Hampton Roads, Virginia, on March 9, 1862. But Wood did not take to ironclad warfare. Although the *Virginia* "revolutionized the navies of the world," Wood considered the vessel "as unwieldy as Noah's ark."²⁶ What he really craved was action on the open deck of a warship, not the cramped conditions on board a lumbering iron tub. Wood was a proponent of swift warfare, not the clumsy, laboring kind between warring ironclad vessels.

Beginning in late 1862, John Taylor Wood adopted a mode of naval warfare that would make him a hero in the Confederacy and a nuisance to the Federal navy. Wood probably enjoyed greater freedom in picking, choosing, and plotting his missions because of his relationship with the Confederate president. As early as August 1862 Wood had questioned the

²⁵ For a discussion of the changing nature of naval warfare, see William N. Still, Jr., *Iron Afloat: The Story of the Confederate Armorclads* (Nashville, Tennessee, 1971), especially Chapter One.

²⁶ Nomination of Jefferson Davis, Executive Session, December 7, 1861, *Journal of the Congress of the Confederate States of America, 1861-1865*, 7 vols. (Washington, 1904), 1: 536, hereinafter cited as *Journal of Confederate Congress*; John Taylor Wood, "The First Fight of the Iron-Clads," Clarence C. Buel and Robert U. Johnson, eds., *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 4 vols. (New York, 1886), 1: 692, 696-699.

abilities of Navy Secretary Stephen Mallory, indicating that the initial relationship between Wood and his superior was at best a cold one. Wood believed that the only way for the Confederate navy to be “kicked into vitality” was through rigorous combat.²⁷ Wood plotted a series of nighttime raids to challenge the Federal presence on the Chesapeake Bay. Small parties of raiders were to board and take possession of Federal vessels, hoping to capture the ships and employ them in Confederate service. If they were unsuccessful in capturing the ships, the boarding parties were to destroy them. This mode of warfare, exercised by Wood in three separate instances, won for him the reputation of a bold officer.

On October 7, 1862, Wood and his handpicked crew struck and destroyed a transport vessel, the *Francis Elmore*, on the Potomac River. Later that month, Wood’s band captured and burned the Federal merchant ship *Alleghanian*. An alarmed Gideon Welles cautioned the Potomac flotilla to be on the lookout for more attacks by the rebels.²⁸ Emboldened by his success in destroying unarmed steamers, Wood determined to capture Federal gunboats in the vicinity. Increased Federal security measures in the Chesapeake, however, compelled Wood to postpone his proposed attack.

In January 1863 Wood was nominated to serve as naval aide-de-camp to Jefferson Davis, further strengthening their relationship. The Confederate Senate confirmed the appointment on February 9, 1863, and Wood was given the rank of colonel of cavalry in addition to his rank as naval lieutenant.²⁹ Wood’s new duties required him to inspect Confederate naval fortifications, coastal defenses, vessels and generally advise the president on naval matters. In February 1863,

²⁷ Wood to Catesby AP R. Jones, August 30, 1862, *ORN*, series 2, 2: 256-257; Wells, *The Confederate Navy: A Study in Organization*, 7. Wells notes that once Wood became a naval aide to Jefferson Davis he no longer publicly criticized Stephen Mallory.

²⁸ Luraghi, *A History of the Confederate Navy*, 300-301; Shingleton, *Sea Ghost*, 62-69; Gideon Welles to Commodore A.A. Harwood, November 17, 1862, *ORN*, series 1, 5: 140.

²⁹ Nomination of Jefferson Davis, Executive Session, January 26, 1863 and Confirmation of Senate, Executive Session, February 9, 1863, *Journal of Confederate Congress* 3: 33, 59-60.

Wood traveled to Wilmington, Charleston, Savannah, Mobile, Port Hudson, and Vicksburg, a tour that resulted in several recommendations about defenses and fortifications.³⁰

Wood's assignment as an aide to Jefferson Davis opened new doors for him. The naval officer was introduced to the movers and shakers behind Confederate military policy including General Robert E. Lee. Wood's relationship with Lee led to support from the commanding general for Wood's clandestine operations.

August 1863 saw Wood step up his raids against Federal gunboats on the Chesapeake. Wood's intuition told him that adequate time had passed since his previous attacks, leaving the Union navy complacent and unprepared. Wood and his band of raiders captured two gunboats, the USS *Satellite* and the USS *Reliance* on August 23, 1863. Employing the *Satellite* and *Reliance* as Confederate warships, Wood then seized three Union merchant vessels. The mission was called a "brilliant achievement" by one Richmond newspaper. "Lieut. Wood, whose name is now famous," the editor declared, "is a naval officer of experience." Elated by his nephew's successful military operations, Jefferson Davis wrote to Wood's wife extolling the raider's adventures and expressing his hope that her husband would soon safely return to Richmond.³¹

Wood's success on the Chesapeake earned him a promotion to commander and the opportunity to cooperate with General Lee in a raid in North Carolina in 1864. Hoping to alleviate the Federal presence in eastern North Carolina, Lee dispatched troops to attack New Bern, which had been in Federal hands since March 1862. Coordination between the army and navy would be crucial, as Union gunboats on the Neuse and Trent Rivers covered the town. Hoping Wood's good fortune would continue, Lee planned for Wood to capture a Federal

³⁰ Jefferson Davis to Wood, February 9, 1863, Scrapbook (microfilm), Wood Papers, SHC; Wood to Davis, February 14, 1863, *ORN*, series 1, 7: 859-860.

³¹ Luraghi, *History of the Confederate Navy*, 301-303; Report of the Secretary of the Navy, November 30, 1863, *ORN*, series 2, 2: 539; *The Sentinel*, August 26, 1863; Davis to Dear Lola [Wood], August 25, 1863, Scrapbook (microfilm), Wood Papers, SHC.

gunboat at New Bern and fend off the enemy's navy while the Confederate army assaulted the town. A successful attack in eastern North Carolina would, if nothing else, boost Confederate morale, Lee believed. A dissident faction in the state complained that the Confederate war effort was failing because of poor leadership by Jefferson Davis and Governor Zebulon Vance. A successful expedition at New Bern might therefore silence the critics. At the very least an attack would offer the chance to procure supplies and food from the region for Lee's hungry army and ward off Union cavalry raids on the Wilmington & Weldon Railroad, a vital artery of supply for the Army of Northern Virginia.³²

The Confederate attack on New Bern in February 1864 did not unfold the way Lee and Wood had hoped. Although Wood and his raiders boarded the USS *Underwriter* on the Neuse River during the pre-dawn hours of February 2, 1864, they were unable to commandeer the vessel. The ship's steam boilers were banked and guns from nearby shore batteries began to zero in on the vessel after Federal sailors, who had escaped the on board struggle, alerted their army comrades of the ship's capture. Now facing the prospect of being killed or captured, Wood decided to abandon and burn the vessel. He and his men set the *Underwriter* on fire and made their escape.³³

Without the assistance of naval forces, Major General George Pickett faced the unenviable task of attacking the fortified town on his own, and he failed to effectively coordinate his land forces. "The attempt of the army was a failure," a naval officer proclaimed, "but our effort for once was a complete and thorough success and the whole country hereabouts is

³² Nomination of Jefferson Davis, Executive Session, December 14, 1863 and Confirmation of the Senate, Executive Session, December 29, 1863, *Journal of the Confederate Congress* 3: 461, 495; Shingleton, *Sea Ghost*, 90-92; John G. Barrett, *The Civil War in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1963), 202-203; Joe A. Mobley, "War Governor of the South": North Carolina's Zeb Vance in the Confederacy (Gainesville, Florida, 2005), 99-116; Lee to Davis, January 20, 1864 and Lee to Major General George E. Pickett, January 20, 1864, *OR*, series 1, 33: 1101-1103.

³³ Shingleton, *Sea Ghost*, 90-115.

congratulating ‘our gallant little Navy.’” Wood’s devotion to his duty enhanced General Lee’s respect for him, and led to his selection to head an attack on Point Lookout.³⁴

The proposed Point Lookout mission reflected Jefferson Davis’s grand strategy to gain political objectives through military means in the summer of 1864. The plan called for an assault on Point Lookout to free Confederate prisoners confined there. If the scheme succeeded, the attacks might ease the Federal grip on Petersburg and Richmond and, it was hoped, be a devastating blow to Lincoln’s reelection campaign. “If successful in thus liberating and arming our imprisoned soldiers Washington will be assaulted [by the liberated prisoners] and no doubt carried,” wrote John Tyler, son of the former president and Confederate War Department official in Richmond. “This I regard as decidedly the most brilliant idea of the war.” Tyler was encouraged by the promise of the Point Lookout expedition. Envisioning a successful prison break and subsequent assault on Washington, Tyler surmised that the attack would result in a financial panic in the North, assuring Lincoln’s defeat at the polls and instigating a “counter-revolution” among the disgruntled populace.³⁵

President Davis may have been influenced by information he received about the treatment of Confederate soldiers in Federal prisons. John Hunt Morgan, the famed cavalry raider and himself a former prisoner of war, wrote to Davis in March 1864, decrying the treatment that he and his officers had faced while imprisoned in Ohio in 1863. Morgan implored the president to take reprisals against imprisoned Federal officers, subjugating them to solitary

³⁴ Scharf, *History of the Confederate Navy*, 396-402; Barrett, *Civil War in North Carolina*, 203-212; Gift to Shackelford, February 5, 1864, Gift Papers, SHC. John G. Barrett claimed that Pickett bungled the operation, noting that command would have been better left to Brigadier General Robert Hoke who was both more familiar with the vicinity and proposed a feasible plan for the coordinated attack. Barrett also believed Wood’s part in the operation to be a success. While the *Underwriter* was destroyed, Wood nonetheless fell short of his planned objective to capture a Union gunboat and use it to control the waters around New Bern and fend off any other Federal vessels in the area. Had Wood been able to capture the *Underwriter*, he may have alleviated the pressure on Confederate infantry forces assaulting New Bern. Although not a tactical success, Wood did bolster his already esteemed reputation as a man of action.

³⁵ John Tyler to Major General Sterling Price, July 9, 1864, *OR*, series 1, 40, part 3: 758-759.

confinement as he had been. Morgan hoped that Davis would do this “in the name and for the sake of those men who have always been foremost in the defence of our Southern Cause.” Davis conferred with Secretary of War James Seddon and learned that retaliation on Federal prisoners was impractical. Overcrowding in Southern prisons meant that adequate space was at a premium and solitary confinement unrealistic.³⁶

An attempt to free Confederate prisoners at Point Lookout would serve an additional political purpose. Morgan described the prison conditions as “more misery than human nature can long bear.” To free the prisoners would not only damage Lincoln’s standing in the North; it would undoubtedly bolster Confederate resolve and morale.³⁷

Approximately 15,000 prisoners were incarcerated at Point Lookout in the summer of 1864. The prison, located on a peninsula bounded by the Potomac River on the west and south and the Chesapeake Bay on the east, was less than ten miles from Confederate soil. Its proximity made a raid against it tempting to Confederate authorities.³⁸ The plan to liberate the prisoners, if it was to be successful, would rely on secrecy and precision. Wood and Colonel G.W.C. Lee were to run the blockade at Wilmington, North Carolina, in a ship loaded with arms, ammunition, and accouterments for the prisoners and then, assisted by Colonel Bradley T. Johnson, coordinate an attack on Washington. The mission did not unfold as Wood and Lee had planned as problems occurred in procuring weapons and ammunition at Wilmington. Moreover, the press got word of the scheme and the mission soon became public knowledge. An exasperated Jefferson Davis wrote to Lee: “In this town [Richmond] I hear the expedition is

³⁶ John Hunt Morgan to Jefferson Davis, March 24, 1864, Jefferson Davis Papers, Perkins Library, Duke University (hereafter cited as Davis Papers, PLDU).

³⁷ Morgan to Davis, Davis Papers, PLDU..

³⁸ W. Hoffman to Edwin Stanton, May 19, 1864 and James H. Thompson to Richard F. Andrews, June 23, 1864, *OR*, series 2, 7: 152, 399-400; Edwin W. Beitzell, *Point Lookout Prison Camp for Confederates* (Leonardtown, Maryland, 1972), 50; see George B. Davis, Leslie J. Perry, and Joseph W. Kirkley, *The Official Military Atlas of the Civil War* (New York, 2003), 320-321, plate 137.

spoken of on the street. Shall it proceed under change of circumstances and possibility of notice being given the enemy?”³⁹

A dispatch from Major General W.H.C. Whiting, commander of Confederate forces at Wilmington, indicated that the secret plan was “on the street” in Charleston, South Carolina and in Wilmington. Robert E. Lee sent a dispatch to the Confederate president, along with a copy of the *New York Herald* from July 8, 1864. Lee instructed Davis to notice that Early’s foray into Maryland had “put them [the Northern population] in bad temper as well as bad humor.” The news of Northern discomfiture was offset by a report that revealed the removal of prisoners from Point Lookout. Davis cabled Wood on July 10 and informed him that he feared the proposed expedition was doomed. In a sign of respect for Wood’s military judgment, Davis only suggested aborting the mission and allowed Wood to make the final decision with his usual “calm consideration.”⁴⁰ In the end, Wood heeded Davis’s advice and decided not to attempt to liberate the prisoners at Point Lookout. His discretion was prudent, as Federal authorities had been forewarned of the mission and had transferred many prisoners to a more secure location.⁴¹

The stillborn Point Lookout expedition was nonetheless important for several reasons. First, it reinforced the program that Davis, Lee, and Wood prescribed during the summer of 1864 leading up to the Union presidential election. In their minds military havoc on Northern soil would create political chaos and strengthen Confederate chances for peace, if not nationhood.

³⁹ G.W.C. Lee to Davis, July 9, 1864, *OR*, series 1, 40, part 3: 757; Davis to Robert E. Lee, July 8, 1864, *OR*, series 1, 40, part 3: 749.

⁴⁰ Whiting to Davis, July 10, 1864, *PJD* 10: 512; Robert E. Lee to Davis, July 10, 1864, *Lee’s Dispatches*, 279-280; Davis to Wood, July 10, 1864 and Davis to G.W.C. Lee, July 10, 1864, *OR*, series 1, 40 part 3: 761.

⁴¹ B.F. Butler to Colonel Townsend, July 7, 1864 and Welles to Commodore F.A. Parker, July 8, 1864, *ORN*, series 1, 5: 458; Beitzell, *Point Lookout*, p. 53. As early as July 7, Major General Benjamin F. Butler reported that a Confederate deserter informed him of the plan to free prisoners at the Maryland prison. Consequently, Gideon Welles urged caution among his naval officers in the area, asking for extra protection from his gunboats stationed near the prison. Lieutenant M.S. Stuyvesant, commander of the USS *Minnesota* anchored near Point Lookout, reported to Welles that four reliable refugees had also warned him of the plot. According to the refugees “800 sailors and marines, under John T. Wood, left Richmond on the 7th or 8th of July, to man two armed blockade runners at Wilmington, NC, for the purpose of attempting the release of prisoners confined here.” Even the prisoners at Point Lookout apparently knew of the plan to affect their release.

Were Davis, Lee, and Wood correct in their judgment of the Northern political climate? Their cautious optimism was not without merit, as Lincoln seemed to be losing support among Northerners by July 1864. “If this rebel ‘raid’ does not prove the ruin of this Administration, it will be Owing to successes in other quarters,” a Washingtonian noted in his diary. “More stupidity could not well be manifested than it has been shown in this matter,” he continued, “with Washington in a defenceless condition and inviting the invader.”⁴²

Second, the decision to place John Taylor Wood in command of the naval arm of the expedition solidified his status as one of the preeminent officers in the Confederate States Navy. Davis and Lee trusted Wood’s judgment and discretion when it came to military matters. It also signaled Wood’s understanding of the political objectives involved in military operations. Privy to the highest military and political circles in the Confederacy, Wood understood exactly what the Davis and Lee team hoped to accomplish in their design of the war effort in the east. Although Confederate morale rose, Davis, Lee, and Wood realized that the advantage of numbers and materiel was with the Federals. If a scheme could be designed to break the morale of the Northern populace and alleviate the military pressure brought upon the South, the balance sheet of the war might be altered.

The abandonment of the Point Lookout expedition signaled part of the frustration of Davis’s plan to take advantage of the turbulent political climate in the North through military action. The Confederate president and General Lee certainly knew by the summer of 1864 that they were in a race against time. Neither they nor John Taylor Wood had entirely discarded the idea of using military force to influence the presidential contest. The anger provoked by General Early’s movement on Washington proved the vulnerability of the Northern mindset in the summer of 1864. The aborted Point Lookout mission left Wood looking for other alternatives to

⁴² Diary entry of July 16, 1864, The Diary of Horatio Nelson Taft, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

foster Northern discord. By mid-July 1864 Wood believed he had found the answer and set about planning the next part of the Confederate offensive. This time, though, he would rely exclusively on his skill and daring as a naval officer.

CHAPTER THREE-THE CRUISE

The failure of the Point Lookout expedition left John Taylor Wood pondering other ways to strike against the North. During his stay in Wilmington, North Carolina, where he coordinated the raids on New Bern and Point Lookout, Wood surveyed the docks for a swift blockade running vessel that could be converted into a Confederate cruiser. What emerged in Wood's mind was a plan to run the blockade at Wilmington and raid against Union commerce vessels off of New York and New England. Unlike earlier commerce raiding done on the high seas, Wood's raiding would be in the face of the enemy. Incorporating psychological warfare into his strategy, Wood hoped a successful raid might also influence the approaching presidential campaign.¹

Confederate military operations in July 1864 offered some political benefits to the Northern Democratic Party. Taking stock of the political climate of the North and the course of the war, party officials postponed their national nominating convention, originally slated to meet in early July, until the end of August. Jubal Early's advance on Washington emboldened the peace wing of the Democratic Party, known as the Copperheads, a group that advocated letting the Confederacy go. In their view, mounting Union battlefield deaths, financial difficulties, and Lincoln's restriction of civil liberties made further prosecution of the war unreasonable. The Copperheads were not averse to an independent Confederacy or the existence of slavery in the South. The most vocal of these Peace Democrats was Clement Vallandigham, an Ohioan who Lincoln had banished to the South for his outspoken views and anti-war stance. Vallandigham

¹ Wood, "*Tallahassee's* Dash," 409.

would not be silenced, however, and he sneaked back into Ohio in 1864 to campaign for the election of a peace candidate.²

The surge of support for peace in the North was due principally to the ineffective Federal war effort rather than the return of a political exile. Lincoln sensed the temperament of the Northern public and responded by initiating unofficial peace negotiations with the Confederacy. Horace Greeley, editor of the *New York Tribune*, threw his weight behind the peace efforts and agreed to meet with Confederate officials at Niagara Falls, Canada, in July 1864. The Confederate envoys, Greeley reported to Lincoln, were acting only as independent Southerners interested in peace.³ Since the agents were unable to negotiate for the Confederate government, the meeting was aborted. The conference proved to be beneficial for the Union peace element and the Confederate independence effort. The Southern agents successfully made it appear as if Lincoln would not negotiate a peaceful end to the war. Despite the fact that the Confederate agents were not official representatives of their government, Copperhead editors portrayed Lincoln as a butcher, unwilling to consider peace even in the face of Federal setbacks on the battlefield. “All the northern friends of peace we have seen think, as the matter now stands, it has weakened the Administration,” the Confederate agents in Canada wrote to Jefferson Davis.⁴

² Klement, *Copperheads in the Middle West*, 231-232; David Herbert Donald, Jean Harvey Baker, and Michael F. Holt, *The Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York, 2001), 420-421. Klement noted that Vallandigham and other Peace Democrats hoped his return in June 1864 would lead to his arrest and further flame the fire of political discord. Vallandigham ostensibly returned because his mother was ill. Lincoln, though, was aware of the political trap, and Union authorities did not harass Vallandigham.

³ Donald, Baker, and Holt, *Civil War and Reconstruction*, 421-422; Historian Edward Steers, Jr. saw the mission of the Confederate agents, especially Jacob Thompson and Clement C. Clay, as part of a Confederate terror campaign in 1864. He asserted: “It was Thompson and Clay’s charge to wreak as much havoc throughout the northern states as they could. In part, this was to take the form of attacks against the civilian population, including the burning of major cities, the bombing of manufactories and ships, and the spread of infectious diseases. Such attacks can only be described as terrorist in nature.” See his article “Terror: 1860’s Style,” *North and South* 5, No. 4 (May 2002): 12-18. The quotation may be found on p. 14.

⁴ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 766-767; C.C. Clay and James P. Holcombe to Jefferson Davis, July 25, 1864, *PJD* 10: 559-561.

Lincoln soon made another effort to test the Confederacy's conditions for peace, sending unofficial envoys to Richmond in July 1864 with the hopes that they might gain an audience with Jefferson Davis. James F. Jaquess, a colonel of volunteer troops and a Methodist preacher, and noted writer James R. Gilmore claimed that they had no authority from Lincoln to negotiate an end to the war. "We come as men and Christians, not as diplomatists, hoping, in a frank talk with Mr. Davis, to discover some way by which this war may be stopped," the gentlemen explained to Confederate authorities.⁵ The men asked Davis what his conditions were for peace, to which the Confederate president replied, "Withdraw your armies from our territory, and peace will come of itself. We do not seek to subjugate you. We are not waging an offensive war, except so far as it is offensive-defensive, - that is, so far as we are forced to invade you to prevent your invading us. Let us alone, and peace will come at once." The Federal agents replied that reunion was essential to peace. Davis retorted that the Northern states had sewn the seeds of civil war by prohibiting the South from governing itself. Davis concluded: "We are fighting for Independence, - and that, or extermination, we will have." During the meeting, Davis laid out his objectives to the Federal commissioners. Confederate military operations in 1864 were for the singular purpose of securing independence. The demands of the two presidents, reunion for Lincoln and independence for Davis, fell upon deaf ears. Their goals would have to be accomplished on the battlefield. Davis clung to the hope that the constant military pressure applied on the North would stoke the fire of peace sentiment.⁶

⁵ Donald, Baker, and Holt, *Civil War and Reconstruction*, 422; Edmund Kirke, "Our Visit to Richmond," *The Atlantic Monthly* 14 (September 1864): 372-383. The quotation is found on p. 377. Edmund Kirke was the penname of James R. Gilmore. Although the two men claimed that they were in Richmond unofficially, they had met with Lincoln to hear his ideas of peace and negotiations. See Lincoln to Ulysses S. Grant, July 6, 1864, *CWL* 7: 429 as well as n. 1.

⁶ Kirk, "Our Visit to Richmond," 378-379. Addressing the mission of Jaquess and Gilmore and the reply of Davis, David Herbert Donald wrote, "Reasonable people could only conclude that neither President wanted serious peace negotiations." See Donald, *Lincoln*, 523. It may be argued that both presidents wanted peace, but were unwilling to

Confederate Secretary of the Navy Stephen Mallory and John Taylor Wood were ready to apply new offensive methods as part of Davis's offensive-defensive strategy in July 1864. Mallory, Wood, and the Confederate president were of the same mind when it came to naval warfare. In March 1864, Mallory laid out his plans for an effective offensive campaign to "turn the trading mind of New England to thoughts of peace." Mallory concocted an ambitious commerce raiding operation replete with cruisers "on the New England coast and fishing banks, in the West Indies and South Atlantic, in the Pacific among the whalemens, and in the East Indies." Mallory conveyed his plan to James D. Bulloch, the Confederate naval agent in Europe responsible for the construction and acquisition of Confederate cruisers. The secretary's determination to inflict damage upon the enemy's trade and commerce grew over the course of the war, and in John Taylor Wood he found an officer who shared his vision.⁷

The objectives of commerce raiding were not the same by August 1864 as they had been earlier in the war. This was due in part to necessity and in part to design. Historian Frank Merli best described Mallory's scheme as an effort to disrupt Union economic life, distress the population in coastal cities, harm Union trade, and arouse war weariness. Merli further suggests that Mallory's ostensible goal was to spread the Union fleet across the globe in search of the Confederate commerce raiders. Yet, by mid-summer 1864, the means to do this were not readily available. As Great Britain became more concerned about the international ramifications of building ships that were converted into Confederate war vessels, James Bulloch and his lieutenants in Europe found roadblocks on previously open avenues. The diplomacy of President Abraham Lincoln and Secretary of State William Seward dissuaded Great Britain from becoming

negotiate peace. Each man stood firm in their conviction of what was right and proper and ignored those in their respective sections that castigated their vision.

⁷ Mallory to Bulloch, March 21, 1864, *ORN*, series 2, 2: 613-615; Mallory to My Dear Attie, June 15, 1861 and Mallory to Wife, July 21, 1862, Mallory Papers, SHC.

directly involved in the American conflict. Using just the right mixture of political refinement with an undertone of stern warning, the United States Department of State had managed to prevent the British, and consequently other European nations, from recognizing the Confederacy as a sovereign nation. As Bulloch readily admitted, Great Britain was the “arsenal, treasury, and dockyard of the greater part of the world.”⁸ It was his duty to procure ships for the Confederate navy without thwarting British neutrality, and he was largely successful early in the war. Seward often complained that Great Britain violated the provisions of neutrality in allowing Bulloch and his agents to contract with the shipyards of England. United States minister to Great Britain Charles Francis Adams carefully walked the diplomatic tightrope, tempering the brash and sometimes bellicose rhetoric of Seward. Adams strove to counter the efforts of Bulloch, making it more difficult for Confederate agents to obtain vessels by mid-1863.⁹

Obtaining vessels in Europe formed the backbone of Stephen Mallory’s commerce raiding plans in 1862 and 1863. These steamers were often large seafaring vessels, capable of prowling international shipping lanes on the high seas. The two most successful raiders were the CSS *Florida* and the CSS *Alabama*. Both of these ships used steam and sail to roam the high seas and create panic in the North. Both vessels compiled an impressive list of captures and prizes during their cruises. The procurement of each raider was also indicative of the dubious nature of contracting vessels for the purpose of war in the domain of a neutral nation.¹⁰

Great Britain acknowledged the belligerency of the Confederacy in May 1861, yet never officially recognized the government as a sovereign power. Confederate diplomacy centered on gaining recognition of sovereignty and the fleeting hope that Great Britain and the other European powers would enter the fray and mediate an end to the war or, better yet, throw its

⁸ Merli, *Great Britain and the Confederate Navy*, 16-17; Bulloch, *Secret Service of the Confederate States* 2: 2.

⁹ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 682-683.

¹⁰ See Luraghi, *History of the Confederate Navy*, 217-219, 224-227.

support behind the Confederacy by breaking the Federal blockade. Working in tandem with the Confederate State Department, Stephen Mallory hoped that commerce raiding would weaken the Union blockade and demonstrate to Europe that the South could win the war. If Federal blockaders were compelled to leave their stations to chase down commerce raiders, Confederate blockade runners could operate in and out of Southern ports more easily. International law stipulated that blockades must be effective to be respected by neutral powers. The Confederacy's aim was to show the world that the Union blockade was ineffective.¹¹

Confederate commerce raiders never brought adequate pressure to bear on the Federal blockade, however. The *Florida* and *Alabama*, along with other raiders, caused Gideon Welles a fair share of anxiety and engendered protests from maritime interests in the North. Their success drove up insurance rates and freight costs in 1863. Merchants were forced to transfer their shipping registers to neutral flags to avoid being harassed on the high seas, and men working in the shipping trade, such as shipbuilders and machinists, worried that they would be left unemployed by the activities of commerce raiders. Effective as the raiders were in inflicting damage on the Northern maritime interests, they never weakened the blockade of the Southern seacoast. The blockade became tighter as the United States Navy grew from a small, inadequate force of 90 ships in April 1861, to a large, imposing force comprising 671 ships by December 1864, 471 of which saw duty on the blockade.¹² Perhaps Union General Benjamin Butler put it best in a letter to Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner after the war. "I do not consider that the [*Alabama*] was even an aid to the Rebellion," he wrote. "She could not give the Rebels one dollar, one gun, one man." As far as Butler was concerned, the war was to be won or lost at

¹¹ Spencer, *The Confederate Navy in Europe*, 93-104.

¹² Luraghi, *History of the Confederate Navy*, 232-233; Wise, *Lifeline of the Confederacy*, 7-26; Browning, Jr., *From Cape Charles to Cape Fear*, 1-7, 303-304.

Richmond, and the *Alabama* and other Confederate commerce raiders made little impact on the Virginia front.¹³

Indeed, the *Alabama* and other commerce raiders may not have impeded the Federal ground war, but the menacing presence of these vessels most assuredly was a cause for concern and consternation in the North. The goal of the Confederacy was to secure independence, and thus, commerce raiding must be seen as an integral part of Confederate grand strategy. Did the hopes of using commerce raiding as an effective weapon to gain Confederate independence sink with the *Alabama* in the waters off of Cherbourg, France in June 1864? Stephen Mallory and John Taylor Wood surely did not think so, and the cruise of the *Tallahassee* in 1864 was designed to continue the Confederate waterborne offensive.

After the disappointment of the Point Lookout expedition, John Taylor Wood embraced a new form of Confederate commerce raiding. Mindful of the impact raiding had on the Northern populace, Wood decided to acquire a fast vessel to run the blockade at Wilmington and take the war up the northern coastline. Previously, citizens in New York, Boston, and other cities had only read about the exploits of the commerce raiders on the high seas and the shipping lanes of the Atlantic Ocean. Jefferson Davis's offensive policy would be seen firsthand in the northeast with such a cruise.¹⁴ John Taylor Wood was prepared to take the war to the doorstep of the northeast with a unique commerce raiding mission, essentially continuing the offensive thrust into the North begun with Jubal Early's raid on Washington.

Wood's decision to raid along the northeastern coast was not without precedent. In May 1861, John Newland Maffitt had proposed a mission to destroy the New York Navy Yard. In a prescient journal entry, Maffitt expressed concern that the diplomatic initiatives undertaken by

¹³ Butler's quote is found in Adrian Cook, *The Alabama Claims: American Politics and Anglo-American Relations, 1865-1872* (Ithaca, New York, 1975), 100.

¹⁴ Luraghi, *History of the Confederate Navy*, 310; Kirke, "Our Visit to Richmond," 381-382.

Confederate officials to gain recognition from European powers would prove futile. Advocating the offensive strategy that Davis, Lee, and Wood would employ by 1864, Maffitt suggested that the Confederacy demonstrate its offensive power in an effort to convince Northerners that the new nation could not be conquered. “The moral sentiment of the world is against us, on the question of slavery,” Maffitt confided to his journal. “We must achieve our own independence & alone.” Maffitt later put his ideas of offensive naval warfare to use while commanding the CSS *Florida* on the Atlantic Ocean.¹⁵

Although Maffitt never carried out his plan to attack New York, he did authorize a raid on the coast of the United States that demonstrated to Wood the value of such a mission. In May 1863 Lieutenant Charles W. Read of the CSS *Florida* proposed a cutting-out expedition against Union gunboats on the Chesapeake Bay. If he failed to seize or destroy an enemy vessel, Read planned to attack shipping interests at Baltimore. Maffitt consented to Read’s plan, applauding his “patriotic devotion to the cause of [his] Country.” The *Florida* had recently captured the bark *Clarence* off Brazil. Maffitt turned over the vessel to Read for his proposed raid. Maffitt planned to eventually join forces with Read for a general attack on shipping off New England.¹⁶

En route to the Chesapeake, Read captured three merchantmen. He also managed to overtake the bark *Tacony*. Read then scuttled the *Clarence* and transferred his command to the faster *Tacony*. After interrogating prisoners from his prizes, Read concluded that his original plan to enter the Chesapeake at Hampton Roads was too risky, as it was unlikely that he could elude Union ships at the mouth of the bay. He therefore turned his sights on the New England

¹⁵ Journal entry for May 2, 1861, John Newland Maffitt Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill, hereinafter cited as Maffitt Papers, SHC. For a well-researched biography of Maffitt, see Royce Gordon Shigleton, *High Seas Confederate: The Life and Times of John Newland Maffitt* (Columbia, South Carolina, 1994).

¹⁶ C.W. Read to Maffitt, May 6, 1863 & Maffitt to Read, May 6, 1863, Maffitt Papers, SHC; Maffitt to Mallory, May 11, 1863, *ORN*, series 1, 2: 648-650.

coast. In a twenty-one day period, Read seized or burned twenty-two merchant vessels. Gideon Welles and the Navy Department were both concerned and embarrassed by Read's raid. The secretary sent all available warships to pursue the *Tacony*. Read was finally caught near Portland, Maine and subsequently imprisoned at Fort Warren in Boston.¹⁷

Read's success revealed to John Taylor Wood the vulnerability of the Northern coastline. Using a bark, neither particularly fast nor heavily armed, Read had struck fear in the hearts of his antagonists, attracted the attention of thirty-eight Federal warships sent to pursue him, and caused Gideon Welles much distress. Read's accomplishments boded well for Wood's proposed raid in the CSS *Tallahassee*. Northerners read their newspapers with reports of Federal setbacks on the battlefield and were shocked to learn that Confederate forces had almost overrun Washington. Wood hoped that he could incite more dissonance with a naval attack.¹⁸

Mallory still clung to the notion that a commerce raider roving close to the northeast coast would weaken the blockade by forcing squadron commanders to dispatch ships to chase the raider. Frustrated by the inability to acquire a satisfactory vessel in Europe like the *Florida* and *Alabama*, Mallory looked elsewhere. Blockade runners, although employed as unarmed merchant vessels, could reach speeds upwards to fifteen knots, and could easily be converted into commerce raiders. Mallory hoped that the deployment of a fast raider along the northeastern shoreline would compel blockading vessels to abandon their stations at Wilmington, the last major port open to the Confederacy. The key was to locate a vessel for the operation. In

¹⁷ Hearn, *Gray Raiders of the Sea*, 83-93.

¹⁸ Hearn, *Gray Raiders*, 93. Surprisingly, historians have not adequately linked the connection between Read's mission and that of Wood. Wood's position in Richmond and the Confederate navy surely left him with good information on the particulars of Read's mission. Although not documented, this writer believes that Wood relied on Read's mission as a blueprint for his August 1864 cruise. Read demonstrated the cool improvisation of a raider at sea, but failed to plot avenues of escape.

Wilmington, John Taylor Wood had been alerted to keep an eye out for such a ship. He found just such a vessel in July 1864.¹⁹

The ship that Wood chose was the blockade runner *Atalanta*, built by the J. & W. Dudgeon Company of Millwall, England in 1863, 220 feet long with twin screw propellers.²⁰ The *Atalanta*, like most blockade runners, was built for speed and stealth and relied more on coal-powered steam engines than sail for propulsion. Due to the limited size of the coal bunkers, it was not feasible for the ship to make extended cruises like that of the *Florida*, *Alabama*, and *Shenandoah*. That said, the ship was ideal for a raid along the northeastern coast of the United States. The proximity of the raiding waters lessened the need for an excessive amount of coal. Additionally, in the event that the raider ran short on fuel, it was hoped that a sufficient amount of coal could be transferred from a captured merchant vessel. Eager to convert the vessel into a commerce raider, the Confederate government purchased the *Atalanta* and gave command of her to Wood. Stephen Mallory's orders to the new commander were "general in scope," according to Wood. He was to oversee the conversion and outfitting of the vessel, hand pick a crew, and attack Federal merchant vessels along the northeastern coastline.²¹

Wood mounted three pieces of artillery on board the ship. A raider needed guns to attack her prey and for protection. Wood selected only three cannon for two reasons. First, as with all blockade runners, additional weight hindered the ship from reaching its maximum speed. Second, commerce raiding relied upon making a demonstration against vulnerable targets,

¹⁹ Mallory to Bulloch, August 19, 1864, *ORN*, series 2, 2: 707-708; Wood, "Tallahassee's Dash," 409.

²⁰ The vessel is referred to as both the *Atalanta* and the *Atlanta*. Wood himself termed the vessel the *Atlanta*, while an expert of the ships of the Civil War, Paul Silverstone, refers to the vessel as the *Atalanta*. Both spellings are used interchangeably in the literature on John Taylor Wood. See Paul H. Silverstone, *Warships of the Civil War Navies* (Annapolis, Maryland, 1989), 215.

²¹ Silverstone, *Warships of the Civil War Navies*, 215; Statistical Data of Confederate Ships, *ORN*, series 2, 1: 268; Shingleton, *Sea Ghost*, 118-121; Wood, "Tallahassee's Dash," 409. The vessel was purchased at a price of £25,000, whereas Mallory estimated the construction cost to be £17,000. See Mallory to John N. Maffitt, February 24, 1865, *ORN*, series 2, 2: 804-806. The vessel was purchased from an importing firm based in Atlanta, Georgia. Directors of the company were based in Atlanta, London, and Nassau, Bermuda. See Shingleton, *Sea Ghost*, 120.

unarmed merchant vessels in the northeastern waters. A shot across the bow of the quarry usually brought the merchant vessel to heel, at which time a boarding party was sent onto the captured ship to remove all valuables and crew. Afterwards, the captors would set fire to or scuttle the vessel. It would have been pointless to shell a merchant ship before removing any cash or valuables that could be of use to the Confederacy. In addition, physically harming civilian sailors would defeat any claims by the Confederate government that their commerce raiders operated within the boundaries of international law. After complementing the vessel with cannon and a crew of about 100 sailors from Confederate gunboats on the James River and from North Carolina, the *Atalanta* was renamed the CSS *Tallahassee* on July 20, 1864.²²

Wood was probably familiar with most of the men he selected for his mission. His bold reputation inspired sailors to seek positions on his crew. Wood also chose an able set of officers for the *Tallahassee*. Lieutenant William H. Ward was named executive officer. A Virginian, Ward had seen much active duty in the Confederate navy, serving mostly on Confederate ironclads before being assigned to the *Tallahassee*. Wood selected two additional lieutenants - Mortimer Murray Benton and Joseph Gardner - to join his crew. Both Benton and Gardner had known Wood before the war as acting midshipmen in the United States Navy. Benton had served mostly in Texas and Alabama before joining the CSS *Roanoke* of the James River Squadron. Gardner knew firsthand what Wood demanded of his men, as he had been a member of Wood's raiding party that captured the Federal gunboats *Satellite* and *Reliance* on the Chesapeake Bay in August 1863. Acting Master John A. Curtis served in various capacities in both Richmond and Wilmington before August 1864, and engineer John W. Tynan knew Wood

²² Wood, "Tallahassee's Dash," 409. The total number of officers and men on board the *Tallahassee* is not known. Estimates generally run from 100 to 120 men. The *Tallahassee* also had to accommodate the crew of any prizes that were taken, which made for crowded quarters at sea. Wood also protected boilers with cotton bales, tendered an extra supply of coal to increase range, and obtained four barrels of turpentine for use in burning prizes. See Shingleton, "Cruise of the CSS *Tallahassee*," 32.

from his service on board the CSS *Virginia* in the battle of Hampton Roads in March 1862. Almost all of the officers had worked with Wood in some capacity before or during the war. One of the more interesting members of the crew was William Sheppardson, the *Tallahassee*'s surgeon. In addition to caring for the wounded and sick, Sheppardson acted as Wood's public relations agent. He had accompanied Wood on most of his missions, including the captures of the *Satellite* and *Reliance*, and the USS *Underwriter* at New Bern in February 1864. Sheppardson also penned narratives of Wood's exploits for the *Richmond Daily Dispatch*.²³

His crew assembled and his vessel properly fit for the "miserable business of war," John Taylor Wood prepared to make his way to sea in early August 1864. Eluding blockaders at the mouth of the Cape Fear River was dangerous business, and Wood carefully considered how to maneuver the *Tallahassee* past them. Wilmington, the only open Atlantic port to outside sea traffic by then, was twenty-eight miles up the Cape Fear River. Two inlets allowed for passage into the ocean. Several imposing forts protected Old Inlet, the main bar to the south. New Inlet, the northern entrance, was protected by the formidable Fort Fisher, a massive earthen fort on Confederate Point bounded by the river to the west and the ocean to the east. The strong network of forts around the two inlets kept the Federal blockading ships at bay. More often than not the blockaders were forced to watch from a distance as blockade runners made their way into Wilmington's harbor, so well protected by shore batteries and fortifications.²⁴

Wilmington was attractive to blockade runners for several reasons. The protection offered by the forts was important, but the city's location was integral. The port was only 570

²³ The author used a list of officers compiled by Acting Master John A. Curtis some time after the war. See John A. Curtis, "My Personal Remembrance of an Expedition Onboard the Confederate Privateer *Tallahassee* – 1864," typed copy in possession of the author, graciously donated by Carlton Allegood of Wilmington, North Carolina, hereinafter cited as Curtis Memoir. The Muster Roll of the CSS *Tallahassee*, ORN, series 2, 1: 307 is faulty when compared with Curtis's memoir and that of John Taylor Wood. Information on each of the officers is found in *Registers of Officers of the Confederate States Navy*, 203, 14, 67, 44, 199, 178.

²⁴ See Chris E. Fonvielle, Jr., *The Wilmington Campaign: Last Rays of Departing Hope* (Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, 2001), 1-54.

miles from Nassau to the south, 674 miles from Bermuda to the east, and approximately 900 miles from Halifax, Nova Scotia to the north, all havens for blockade runners. Moreover, three major railways ran in and out of Wilmington, along which goods imported through the blockade were sent to the armies on the battlefield and civilians on the home front.²⁵

The shoal waters at the Cape Fear offered advantages to blockade runners. Deep draft Union vessels could not cross the bar, unlike lighter draft blockade runners. Frying Pan Shoals jutted into the Atlantic Ocean for eighteen miles off the southeastern elbow of Bald Head Island, making it more difficult for blockaders to navigate local waters. Five miles separated the two inlets inside the harbor, but the distance was about forty miles on the outside. Federal naval authorities expended great resources to maintain an adequate blockading force at both entrances to the Cape Fear River.²⁶

Wood steamed the *Tallahassee* down the Cape Fear River in early August and waited for the opportunity to run the raider out to sea. The speed of the vessel alone was not sufficient to break the blockade; Wood would also have to rely upon a favorable tide. A moonless night would also assist his efforts to elude the ever-vigilant blockaders. Wood gauged all the variables and chose the night of August 4 to challenge the blockade. Determined to shoot through New Inlet, Wood readied his ship, extinguishing all but the most essential lights on board.²⁷

The cruise of the *Tallahassee* began inauspiciously. The same coastal features that made the harbor difficult to blockade also impeded the *Tallahassee*'s escape. The vessel, heavily laden with coal, struck the "rip," a shoal at the bar. The crew labored for two hours to free the vessel,

²⁵ Wise, *Lifeline of the Confederacy*, 124-132; John Johns, "Wilmington During the Blockade," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 33, issue 196 (September 1866): 497-503.

²⁶ Fonvielle, *Wilmington Campaign*, 21; Browning, Jr., *From Cape Charles to Cape Fear*, 236-239.

²⁷ Wood, "Tallahassee's Dash," 409-410.

by which time the tide had changed and dimmed hope of a successful run. Wood decided to anchor near New Inlet and try again as soon as conditions improved.²⁸

Wood was frustrated again the following night, as the *Tallahassee* again grounded on the rip. This time, however, it took three steamers to pull the raider free. Although another night was lost, Wood was still determined to get to sea. Since New Inlet had proved troublesome, Wood decided to try and run out through Old Inlet, protected by the guns of Forts Caswell, Campbell, and Holmes. The night of August 6 was not as dark as the previous two evenings, but Wood decided he could wait no longer. Grazing a shoal as he passed through the inlet about 10 o'clock, the *Tallahassee* made her getaway. The sudden appearance of two Federal blockaders bearing down on the *Tallahassee* checked Wood's excitement. The steamers fired on the *Tallahassee*, but Wood resisted the temptation of returning fire in order to maintain the secrecy of the mission. Moreover, Wood did not want to get caught in a heavy firefight because his ship was outgunned. A breach of security had ruined the Point Lookout mission before it started, and Wood was determined to keep this mission from suffering a similar fate. Finally outrunning the Union gunboats off Wilmington, Wood continued southward during the night to navigate around Frying Pan Shoals to the east.²⁹

His escape from Wilmington and the first cordon of blockaders did not offer much comfort to Wood. The Federal blockade of the Cape Fear consisted of three rings of vessels; the faster and "most efficient blockaders" were stationed on the outside ring, some forty to fifty miles offshore. These cruisers were assigned the task of running down blockade runners that

²⁸ Wood, "Tallahassee's Dash," 409-410; Wood to Mallory, August 31, 1864, *ORN*, series 1, 3: 701; Shingleton, "Cruise of the CSS *Tallahassee*," 31.

²⁹ Wood, "Tallahassee's Dash," 410; Curtis Memoir, 1. John Taylor Wood's official report stated that he spotted five vessels during the night of the 6th; John Curtis recalled sighting six gunboats and being fired upon until 2:00 a.m. Wood's official report, although brief, probably would have made mention of a prolonged engagement with the Federal blockaders on the night of August 6. He failed to mention any such encounter in his article for *Century*, as well. Curtis may have exaggerated the length of the engagement in his account.

managed to slip through the bar tenders at the mouth of the river. As the sun rose on Sunday, August 7, the crew of the *Tallahassee* sighted a vessel in pursuit, about five miles off. Another Federal cruiser soon joined the chase, but neither ship could match the speed of the *Tallahassee*. About noon, John Taylor Wood led a worship service for his men on the quarterdeck of the ship. Wood's devotion to religion was equal to his devotion to Southern independence. He often quoted scripture or read from the Bible to his crew, and the prewar diary he kept was filled with religious maxims and words of enlightened encouragement. "I much prefer the new Testament to the old as it is so much more consoling & comforting," Wood wrote in 1860. Ironically, just four years later, hardened by the realities of war and the struggle to gain Southern independence, Wood was bound for the coast of New York and New England to engage in destructive warfare like that found in the Old Testament. Wood believed that his mission was justified and righteous and the most advantageous way to ensure Confederate sovereignty.³⁰

Two more cruisers gave chase to the *Tallahassee* on August 7, the last one getting close enough to lob a few shells at the raider. Wood managed eventually to distance himself from the Federal ships, but considered dumping some of his coal overboard to lighten the vessel and increase his speed. Thankful that there was little to no wind to aid the four Union ships that had chased him, Wood must have considered that the limited range of the *Tallahassee* might mitigate his chances for a successful raid. Wood suppressed his concern for the time being and concentrated on making his way to the northeastern coast of the United States.³¹

³⁰ Wood, "Tallahassee's Dash," 410; Browning, *From Cape Charles to Cape Fear*, 238-239; Bohemian [thought to be surgeon William Sheppardson], "The Cruise of the *Tallahassee*," *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, September 19 & 23, 1864, hereinafter cited as Bohemian, *Daily Dispatch*; Diary entry for January 29, 1860, Wood Diary, 1, Wood Papers, SHC. For a compelling discussion of religious motives for combat during the Civil War career of Confederate General Thomas J. Jackson, see Royster, *The Destructive War*, 267-269. This author interprets the faith of John Taylor Wood in the same vein that Royster viewed Jackson. Both men codified their destruction in the name of pious righteousness and felt that their subordinates should be believers as well.

³¹ Wood, "Tallahassee's Dash," 410; Bohemian, *Daily Dispatch*, Sept. 19, 1864.

Wood first targeted New York for two main reasons. First, the port was a center of heavy commercial activity and posed the possibility of a lucrative raid. Second, a number of prominent critics of the Lincoln administration lived in New York. Influential Democrats held sway in New York, many of whom lambasted Lincoln for the bloody war, his conscription policy, and for expanding the Union's war aims to include the emancipation of Southern slaves. Immigrants in New York City, a majority of whom were Democrats, feared that freed slaves would come north and take their jobs. New York Governor Horatio Seymour and other Democratic leaders exploited the fears of their constituents for political purposes, who in turn criticized conscription and abolition. "[T]he bloody and treasonable doctrine of public necessity can be proclaimed by a mob as well as by a government," Seymour railed in July 1863. The governor's proclamation helped provoke a bloody four-day draft and race riot in New York City in mid-July, in which 105 people lost their lives. Rioters targeted army enlistment offices, abolitionists, and African Americans. The frenzied crowds lynched six blacks from makeshift gallows on the streets of the city. The New York police force was unable to control the mobs, prompting the Federal government to send army regiments from Pennsylvania to quell the violence. The Union troops were occasionally forced to fire upon the rioters, and not until late July was order finally restored. While serious social violence did not resume after July 1863, opposition to the Lincoln administration in New York City still lingered.³²

By August 1864, Gideon Welles was gravely concerned about the progress of the war and its effect on the country. Generals Grant and Sherman were engaged in a stalemate in Virginia and Georgia, and United States forces had been slow to respond to Jubal Early's raid on Washington in July. Reflecting the rising wave of dissatisfaction among Democrats and even some Republicans, Welles observed a "feeling of despondency" and "wide discouragement" that

³² McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 606-611. Seymour's quote comes from p. 609.

plagued the nation. “The worst specimens of these wretched politicians are in New York City and State,” the navy secretary wrote. He complained that there was not one “honest, fair-dealing Administration journal in New York City.”³³

Wood sensed the discouragement as well, and hoped to exploit it with a strike at New York City from the sea. If the *Tallahassee*’s raid proved successful, the cauldron of discontent might boil over and scald Lincoln and his supporters. En route to the raiding grounds of the northeastern coast, Wood encountered a few vessels flying the British Union Jack and other foreign flags. Careful not to provoke an international incident, especially with Great Britain, Wood let the vessels pass undisturbed. Wood spoke the schooner *Emma* out of Nassau, a British colonial island, on August 10. Although the schooner did not reward the commander of the *Tallahassee* with a prize, the sailors onboard the *Emma* did provide Wood with newspapers from New York. The newspapers enabled Wood to glean valuable information about which ships were then in port.³⁴

The *Tallahassee*’s raiding began in earnest on August 11, as she approached New York. Her first prize was the *Sarah A. Boyce*, a “new and valuable” schooner out of Boston. Supplies and provisions on board the vessel were removed, along with the crew and their personal belongings. Wood later maintained that he treated his prisoners fairly, perhaps to dispel accusations that his attack constituted mere piracy. Wood cited an instance in which a prisoner claimed that his watch had been stolen. Once the *Tallahassee* commander discovered that, indeed, one of his crewmen had taken the man’s watch, he made sure that the thief returned the timepiece to its owner. Wood also punished the sailor for violating the code of civility. “The chronometers, charts, and medicine-chests were the only things taken out of the prizes,” Wood

³³ Diary entry of August 12, 1864, *Diary of Gideon Welles* 2: 102-103.

³⁴ Wood, “*Tallahassee*’s Dash,” 411; Bohemian, *Daily Dispatch*, September 19, 1864.

claimed, “except such provisions as were necessary.”³⁵ Although Wood insisted that a strict code of behavior was enforced during the cruise, there is not enough evidence from the prisoners taken onto the *Tallahassee* to substantiate his claim.

By mid-morning on August 11, the *Tallahassee* had advanced to within twenty miles of Long Island, where the crew spotted seven ships. The *Tallahassee* signaled a pilot, hoping that he would mistakenly believe that the ship was a merchant vessel headed into New York harbor. Wood also displayed a United States flag from the masthead. The ruse drew the attention of boat No. 22, the *James Funk*. As soon as the pilot boarded the *Tallahassee*, Wood took down the Stars and Stripes and raised the Confederate naval jack. The stunned pilot realized he had been tricked. He and his crew were promptly taken captive, and the *James Funk*, instead of being destroyed, was made a tender to the *Tallahassee*. John Curtis, acting master on the *Tallahassee*, took command of the prize and assisted the larger raider in its destructive activities. Wood’s use of the United States flag to lure prey angered Northerners, who insisted that he and his crew were pirates. “To capture a pilot boat and turn her into a decoy is just as honorable warfare as that other practised by the Rebels on land, of wearing national uniforms, and carrying the Stars and Stripes into battle,” claimed the editor of the *New York Tribune*.³⁶

Along with the *James Funk*, the *Tallahassee* took five more vessels on August 11. Wood burned four of the vessels after taking off their crews and valuables. He bonded the fifth vessel, the schooner *Carrol*, rather than destroy her as the *Tallahassee* was overloaded with more than fifty prisoners by day’s end. The captives were transferred to the *Carrol* and instructed to head to New York City. The *Carrol* instead sailed to Long Island to alert authorities of the *Tallahassee*’s activities. Wood had each of the prisoners sign a parole before their departure, in

³⁵ Wood, “*Tallahassee*’s Dash,” 411; Bohemian, *Daily Dispatch*, September 19, 1864.

³⁶ Bohemian, *Daily Dispatch*, September 19, 1864; Curtis Memoir, 1-2; Wood, “*Tallahassee*’s Dash,” 411; *New York Tribune*, August 16, 1864.

which the captives promised not to take up arms against the Confederacy. The commander later claimed that a skipper of one of his captures was reconciled to the loss of his boat as long as it protected him from being drafted into the Federal army.³⁷

The destruction of seafaring vessels was only part of Wood's grand strategy. Writing long after the war, Wood claimed that he sought to capture pilot boats in an effort to find a pilot who knew the waters around New York City well enough to guide the *Tallahassee* up the East River. Wood allegedly planned to make a nighttime attack on ships in harbor as well as burn the New York Navy Yard. The plan was strikingly similar to those proposed by John Maffitt in 1861 and Charles Read in 1863. Whether Wood concocted the scheme at all has been questioned; surgeon William Sheppardson made no mention of such a plan in his diary.³⁸

Wood failed to find a pilot who "could be paid or coerced" to help make the attack on New York harbor on the night of August 11. Correspondence in the *Official Records* does not substantiate Wood's proposed attack, and when Federal authorities interviewed pilots who had been captured by Wood, they discovered no evidence of such a plan. Had such an attack been discussed with the pilots, they surely would have disclosed it to the proper authorities. After interviewing the freed pilots, one newspaper correspondent reported that "the pirate stated that he was coming into New York harbor." The paper provided no further evidence.³⁹ Wood may have concocted the story simply to make his narrative more interesting, but it was true that the type of

³⁷ Bohemian, *Daily Dispatch*, September 12, 1864; Wood to Mallory, August 31, 1864, *ORN*, series 1, 3: 703; *New York Tribune*, August 15, 1864; Wood, "Tallahassee's Dash," 411. Whether or not the skipper proclaimed this cannot be corroborated. Wood's account was written thirty-four years after the cruise, and he may have added these comments in the hopes of vindicating his raid. As stated earlier, many New Yorkers were displeased with the war policy of Lincoln, especially conscription.

³⁸ Wood, "Tallahassee's Dash," 411; Bohemian, *Daily Dispatch*, September 19, 1864. Although Sheppardson maintained that his diary was unedited when turned over to the *Richmond Daily Dispatch* for print, it seems unlikely that the surgeon would have allowed such a scheme to go to print, as it would have only strengthened Northern protests that the crew of the *Tallahassee* was nothing but a band of pirates.

³⁹ Wood, "Tallahassee's Dash," 411; Hiram Paulding to Gideon Welles, August 14, 1864 & George W. Blunt to Welles, August 15, 1864, *ORN*, series 1, 3: 145-146; *New York Tribune*, August 15, 1864.

destruction he envisioned was discussed in naval circles during the war. Wood, Maffitt, and Read were in agreement as to how to employ the hard hand of war.

Whether his scheme was fictitious or real, Wood oversaw the further destruction of merchant ships off New York on August 12. Six more prizes were burned, bonded, or scuttled during the day. Concerned citizens of New York observed fires on the horizon, confirmation of John Taylor Wood's destructive work. As one of the prizes heaved to, she collided with the *Tallahassee*. The commerce raider's mainmast was damaged and fell overboard. Even so, the *Tallahassee* was still serviceable although now totally dependent on steam propulsion fueled by coal.⁴⁰

The largest prize on August 12 was the transport steamer *Adriatic*, bound from London with 160 to 170 German passengers on board. It took about three hours to transfer the passengers, most of whom spoke little or no English. The inability to communicate with the vast majority of the passengers initially led to brief hysteria, as the travelers feared that Wood was going to burn the ship with them still on it. The process of transferring the prisoners from the *Adriatic* to the tender was time consuming. With the work completed by nightfall of August 12, Wood determined to proceed further up the northeastern coast, as "the neighborhood of New York had been sufficiently worked, and the game was alarmed and scarce."⁴¹

In Washington, D.C., Gideon Welles was bothered by the success of the *Tallahassee* in escaping the blockade at Wilmington and then raiding ships in the waters around New York. Other than Read's improvised attack in 1863, no Confederate commerce raider had dared come so close to the coast of the United States. Welles began receiving telegrams from angry shippers,

⁴⁰ Bohemian, *Daily Dispatch*, September 19, 1864.

⁴¹ Wood, "Tallahassee's Dash," 411-412; Bohemian, *Daily Dispatch*, September 19, 1864. Wood and Sheppardson claimed that the captain of the *Adriatic* was intoxicated, making the transfer more difficult. One prisoner refuted Wood and Sheppardson's claim in a letter to the *New York Times*, September 30, 1864.

merchants, and insurance underwriters in New York. “Will you please have the necessary measures taken, if not already done, to secure [the *Tallahassee*’s] capture?” demanded John D. Jones, president of the Board of Underwriters in New York. An embarrassed Welles responded that every available vessel had been ordered to search for the *Tallahassee*. With a hint of doubt about the Federal navy’s ability to capture the commerce raider, Dunham & Company offered the service of one of their steamers, the *Ericsson*, to the department for a period of six months. Welles was incensed by the offer that implied he was not carrying out his duty and curtly replied: “Not wanted at present.” Welles instructed commanders from Hampton Roads, Boston, Philadelphia, and New York to get any and all vessels to sea at once to capture the “the rebel pirate” *Tallahassee*. Even old and obsolete vessels used to train midshipmen at the United States Naval Academy, which moved from Annapolis, Maryland to Newport, Rhode Island because of the war, were ordered to search for the *Tallahassee*.⁴²

Altogether, sixteen vessels had been deployed to pursue the *Tallahassee* by August 15. Even so, Welles’s consternation was not eased. He confided to his diary that Wood held the advantage. The vast expanse of the ocean made it was easy for the former Naval Academy instructor to elude even the most vigilant pursuers, and “many in command are not vigilant,” Welles complained. “I am already censured in some of the papers for not having vessels, two or three, cruising at the time she appeared,” Welles wrote. As if to buoy his own sinking feeling about the prospects of capturing the *Tallahassee*, Welles rationalized that even if vessels were

⁴² John D. Jones to Welles, August 13, 1864; Welles to John D. Jones, August 13, 1864; Dunham & Co. to Welles, August 13, 1864; Welles to Commander Jonathan Downes, August 13, 1864; Welles to Rear Admiral Silas H. Stringham, August 13, 1864; Welles to Rear Admiral Hiram Paulding, August 13, 1864; C.K. Stribling to Welles, August 13, 1864; G.S. Blake to Welles, August 13, 1864, all citations found in *ORN*, series 1, 3: 140-144.

cruising, there was no way to communicate with them. He dismissed the skepticism of the press as the “senseless complaints of the few loud grumblers.”⁴³

The grumblers, however, did not view their complaints as groundless. New Yorkers, especially those with ties to the commercial shipping interests, viewed the attack of the *Tallahassee* as a serious threat. In their view, a real pirate threatened the coast. “[W]here are Rip Van Winkle Welles’ gunboats?” asked one editor, who believed that repeated requests to the Navy Department to protect New York had been ignored. Another editor announced that the gunboat *Susquehanna*, dispatched to pursue the *Tallahassee*, was still in port “like a log in the water” at Hampton Roads. The war, which most Northerners encountered only in their newspapers, was now on their doorstep. One prisoner of the *Tallahassee* reported that her crew was dressed in “rags and tatters” with some wearing pistols in their belts or slung across their chests. Another paroled prisoner relayed the news that “there was a want of order on board, and that little attention was paid to any except as it came from the captain of the privateer.” One captive even claimed that the *Tallahassee*’s surgeon, William Sheppardson, admitted to him that he had been a member of the party that had seized the ocean liner *Chesapeake* out of New York in December 1863. In that incident, a group of marauders led by John Braine overtook the *Chesapeake*, killed one of the crew and wounded others, stole money from the captain and escaped to Canada. Sheppardson later vehemently denied this assertion, and rejected the notion that prisoners on the *Tallahassee* were mistreated.⁴⁴

Wood attempted to keep his men from engaging in acts of piracy. He freely admitted that he and his men looked rough after many days at sea. In fact, Wood still wore the same naval

⁴³ Diary entry for August 15, 1864, *Diary of Gideon Welles* 2: 105.

⁴⁴ Found in the *Richmond Enquirer*, August 18, 1864 (report taken from the *New York Herald*); found in the *Charleston Mercury*, August 22, 1864 (report taken from the *New York Herald*); *New York Tribune*, August 15, 1864; George W. Blunt to Gideon Welles, August 15, 1864, *ORN*, series 1, 3: 145-146; Robin W. Winks, *Canada and the United States: The Civil War Years* (Montreal, 1971), 247; Bohemian, *Daily Dispatch*, September 19, 1864.

uniform he had been wearing for three years. The crew, suntanned and covered with coal soot, undoubtedly appeared disheveled to their captives. One of the *Tallahassee*'s officers reported to his wife: "It is impossible to keep clean. The coal dust on deck and from the fire-room fills the air with a fine powder which settles in and upon everything in a most provoking and disgusting manner." Despite appearances, Wood attempted to treat his prisoners decently. One captive remarked that Wood seemed friendly enough and took no pleasure in destroying the ships of innocent sailors. He also observed that the pious Wood did not allow swearing onboard the *Tallahassee*. The prisoner went on to make note of the political motives behind Wood's mission. "[Wood] added that he would slacken up the coasting trade so that 'Uncle Abe' would be glad to make peace," he claimed. Yet another prisoner recalled Wood telling him that his vessel was "precisely the sort of ship we want to burn, in order to bring this war to an end by destroying your commerce."⁴⁵ The testimony of these captives revealed the political endgame that Wood sought during the cruise of the *Tallahassee*.

Wood finally concluded that his tender, the pilot boat *James Funk*, now only impeded his operation since the New York waters had been sufficiently hunted. Consequently, John A. Curtis and his small crew burned the pilot boat and returned to the *Tallahassee*. En route to New England, Wood captured two vessels on August 13 and one more the following day. One large bark, the *Glenavon*, was scuttled and prisoners removed. The captain of the *Glenavon*, James Watts, and his wife earned the respect of the *Tallahassee*'s crew by maintaining a calm demeanor despite losing their ship and worldly possessions. Mrs. Watts apparently made comments about Lincoln's inability to prosecute the war, which both Sheppardson and Wood were quick to note. Upon hearing her comments about Lincoln, another prisoner aboard the

⁴⁵ Wood, "Tallahassee's Dash," 415; George Gift to Ellen [Gift], October 2, 1864, Gift Papers, SHC; *New York Tribune*, August 17, 1864, August 15, 1864.

Tallahassee threatened to report the lady to the New York police after they made landfall. The prisoners were soon paroled and placed on a Russian bark bound for New York. The *Tallahassee* then made its way toward Boston Bay.⁴⁶

The contrasting opinions of the prisoners may have been exaggerated by the Confederates to justify the cruise. Nevertheless, the account revealed that many Northerners, not just political pundits or champions of disparate parties in the North, were not of the same mindset on the conduct of the Lincoln administration and the Union's ability to win the war. The cruise of the *Tallahassee* also underscored an intriguing irony in the war. The Confederate government, created in 1861 to protect citizens from the meddling of a government bent on tampering with the sacrosanct rights of property, had by 1864 fully adopted a policy that allowed for the destruction of private property.

Even after a full week at sea, the *Tallahassee*'s coal reserves were adequate to last eight or ten more days. The loss of the mainmast and constant strain on the ship's engines concerned Wood, however. Repairs became necessary to keep the vessel in working order. Wood believed that a stopover in port would allow him to oversee the work and replenish the vessel's coal bunkers. He would then feel more confident about continuing his attacks along the northeastern coast. Halifax, Nova Scotia, a neutral British port, seemed to be the most logical port of call to Wood. As he headed toward the maritime province, Wood attacked merchant vessels along the New England coast. From August 15 to August 17, the *Tallahassee* burned, scuttled, or bonded sixteen vessels, none of which contained cargoes as lucrative as the ships captured off of New York. Most of the vessels destroyed along the New England coast were merely small fishing boats, containing little of value aside from the fish that were soon consumed by the *Tallahassee*'s

⁴⁶ Curtis Memoir, 2; Bohemian, *Daily Dispatch*, September 19, 1864; Wood to Mallory, August 31, 1864, *ORN*, series 1, 3: 703; Wood, "Tallahassee's Dash," 413.

crew. One of the larger prizes, however, held a large quantity of Cardiff anthracite coal, a high quality coal that emitted little smoke. But Lieutenant William Ward's prize crew was unable to transfer the fuel to the *Tallahassee* because of rough seas. Wood contemplated using small boats to do the work, but decided the endeavor would be too dangerous and time consuming.⁴⁷

Knowledge of Wood's attacks on small, privately owned fishing boats subsequently caused quite a stir among both Union authorities and citizens. Surgeon William Sheppardson defended targeting small vessels, writing in his journal that the fishing industry was the "only dependence" of most New Englanders. "By breaking up the fishing trade we destroy the great industrial pursuit of the New England coast," Sheppardson stated. Again, one must question whether this was a part of the diary, as Sheppardson claimed, or added for an article printed in the *Richmond Daily Dispatch* on September 19 to answer critics who denounced the cruise of the *Tallahassee* as a piratical operation. Mallory's instructions to Wood had been ambiguous, and the attacks on fishing vessels did indeed provoke howls of protest in the North. The people of New England and New York recognized that Wood did not differentiate between large and small vessels during his raid. According to the New York press, the *Tallahassee* was out to destroy the entire seacoast trade of New England and New York. "He has preyed chiefly upon small craft, pilot-boats, coasters, and fishing vessels, his evident purpose being to render the confusion and affright as wide-spread as possible by destroying the commerce, not only of large seaports, but the trade of smaller towns," an angry editor declared. The grumbling protests that Welles had earlier dismissed became more venomous. The editor of the *New York Herald* called for the navy secretary to resign from office. "Unquestionably of all the blunders of Abraham Lincoln,

⁴⁷ Bohemian, *Daily Dispatch*, September 19, 1864; Wood, "Tallahassee's Dash," 413.

as the commander-in-chief of the army and navy,” wrote one firebrand, “his adhesion to Welles is the most extraordinary, unaccountable, and inexcusable.”⁴⁸

The Confederate press, on the other hand, lauded the *Tallahassee*’s success on the northeastern coast. Pronounced the heir to the most famous commerce raider, the *Alabama* and its captain Raphael Semmes, the *Tallahassee* and John Taylor Wood were praised for both destroying commercial ships of the Atlantic fleet and raising angst among Northern politicians. Veneration for Wood soared. One newspaper called him “the dashing and heroic Wood,” while another proclaimed the commander “as sagacious, enterprising and intrepid an officer as ever trod a quarter-deck.” Southern dailies refuted the connotation of pirate attached to the *Tallahassee* by both the Northern press and Union naval officers. The *Wilmington Daily Journal* retorted that neither Northerners nor international powers could “raise any quibble,” as the vessel had sailed from a Confederate port where it had been equipped and manned.⁴⁹

As Wood navigated the *Tallahassee* along the northern coast, panic and fear followed in her wake. In July 1864 Governor Samuel Corry of Maine penned a missive to Gideon Welles in which he implored the naval secretary to deploy one or two gunboats to patrol the state’s coast. Fearful of an attack by “piratical cruisers,” Corry complained that his state was devoid of adequate defenses, placing New England commercial vessels in an “utterly exposed condition.” Welles replied that limited resources would not allow him to station a vessel permanently off the coast of Maine “without interfering with other and more important service.” Welles’s offhanded snub displeased Corry and other New Englanders, who interpreted the navy secretary’s comments as meaning that the protection of the New England coast was not a high priority.

⁴⁸ Bohemian, *Daily Dispatch*, September 19, 1864; *New York Tribune*, August 19, 1864; found in the *Richmond Examiner*, August 23, 1864 (report taken from the *New York Herald*).

⁴⁹ *Richmond Examiner*, August 17, 1864; *Wilmington Daily Journal*, August 17, 1864.

Welles probably regretted his casual view of Maine's security when the *Tallahassee* appeared off the state's coast.⁵⁰

The *Hartford Times* reported that the USS *Horace Beals* would be disguised as a merchant vessel, with guns hidden from view, and set a trap for the *Tallahassee* in an attempt to take down the vessel. When the rebel commerce raider was under the Federal gunboat's cannon, the crew was to open fire. There is no evidence to support the *Hartford Times* report, however. In fact, the *Horace Beals* had been ordered from the New York Navy Yard to New Orleans on August 8, 1864. Yet, the fact that the story saw print in the Connecticut newspaper underscored the frustration among Northerners in capturing the *Tallahassee*. The presence of the rebel raider left newspapers suggesting that the best way to destroy the *Tallahassee* was to become its prey!⁵¹ Undeterred by the news of his presence off the coast of Maine or the condition of his ship, Wood continued his attempt to make more captures.

Wood used the thick fog common along Maine's coast to his advantage. Commander A.G. Clary, of the USS *Dacotah*, in pursuit of the *Tallahassee*, reported seeing a red light surrounded by a thick bank of black smoke on the waters off Cape Sable. Clary was unable to navigate through the fog to identify the light's source, but he considered that it may have been the *Tallahassee*. In Clary's view, Wood used the light to attract fishermen in the area and then pounced on the stunned sailors as they came within range. While neither Wood nor Sheppardson

⁵⁰ Samuel Corry to Welles, July 18, 1864, Welles to Samuel Corry, July 29, 1864, *ORN*, series 1, 3: 119, 129.

⁵¹ *Chicago Tribune*, August 30, 1864 (report from the *Hartford Times*); Welles to Hiram Paulding, August 8, 1864, *ORN*, series 1, 21: 602. There is the possibility that the expedition reported in the *Hartford Times* was actually undertaken, but no evidence of the ruse can be found in the *Official Records*. If the vessel left New York under orders from August 8, it most likely was out to sea by the time the *Tallahassee* appeared off the coast of New York on August 11.

made any mention of using lights to attract ships, Sheppardson later reported that the *Tallahassee* approached close enough to shore that people observed the ship.⁵²

Fearful that he might soon run short of coal and knowing that the engines of the *Tallahassee* needed repairs, Wood made his way from Maine to Halifax. As he approached Halifax on August 18, Wood counted thirty vessels that he had scuttled, burned, or bonded. A writer in Chicago, where the national convention of the Democratic Party was set to soon meet, commented that the mission of the *Tallahassee* was a “most destructive one.” That said, the writer measured the monetary value of the *Tallahassee*’s prizes as comparatively light, “a score of which would be weighed down by some single prize of the *Alabama*.” Still, the distress and anxiety of New Yorkers and New Englanders had been “great.”⁵³ Had the value of distress been cashed in at that point, it seemed likely to produce a fortune for the prospects of Confederate independence and the success of the Democratic Party in the upcoming election. The results that John Taylor Wood hoped for, however, were soon dashed.

⁵² A.G. Clary to Rear-Admiral Silas H. Stringham, August 19, 1864, *ORN*, series 1, 3: 153; *Bohemian, Daily Dispatch*, September 19, 1864.

⁵³ Wood to Mallory, *ORN*, series 1, 3: 703-704; *Chicago Tribune*, August 19, 1864.

CHAPTER FOUR-RESULTS

On the surface, John Taylor Wood's first twelve days at sea had been quite successful. Wood had either destroyed or bonded thirty vessels, Northerners were in an uproar over the United States Navy's inability to halt the *Tallahassee*, and news of the raid had reached outlets across the Union and Confederacy. As Democrats prepared to assemble for their national convention in Chicago, news of Wood's mission emboldened the peace faction of the Democratic Party. The raid, directed at defenseless merchantmen, strengthened the Copperhead's case for a cessation of hostilities. In the Copperhead mind, the Confederacy was unconquerable. Conservative Democrats feared that Lincoln's reelection would mean more deaths of Union soldiers in a war that they could not win. Southerners, on the other hand, looked to the raid of the *Tallahassee* with a sense of pride. Wood's operation in Union waters demonstrated both Confederate defiance of the Federal blockade and the ineptitude of Gideon Welles's officers to capture the vessel. Yet Wood's raiding came to a halt once he reached the British colonial port of Halifax, Nova Scotia. Hampered by strict British enforcement of neutrality, Wood was unable to continue his raid after he departed Halifax. In an ironic twist, the August 1864 raid of the *Tallahassee* intensified Northern resolve to defeat the Confederacy while further splintering leadership factions in the Confederacy over how to best prosecute the war. The Union victory at Atlanta in early September 1864 erased most of the handiwork, both political and strategic, that John Taylor Wood had accomplished in August.

Gideon Welles, who had earlier dismissed the criticism of the national press as simple grumbling, had by August 19, 1864 begun to realize how effective the raid of the *Tallahassee* was on the Northern psyche. Welles's aloofness changed to ire. The secretary reprimanded Rear

Admiral Hiram Paulding, commandant of the New York Navy Yard, for not following orders to get the USS *San Jacinto* to sea to search for the *Tallahassee*. Additionally, Welles castigated Paulding for not keeping the department informed of the cruising activities of the *Susquehanna*, *Grand Gulf*, *Eolus*, and *Pontoosuc*. Welles labeled Paulding's inaction "not only a great disappointment to the Department, but [one that] will doubtless be a serious public injury." Mortimer M. Jackson, United States consul in Nova Scotia, reported to Secretary of State William Seward the arrival of the *Tallahassee* at Halifax, questioning why no Federal cruisers were in close pursuit. Welles instructed Paulding that the department must be kept apprised of which vessels had been deployed to hunt for the *Tallahassee* in order to manage search operations effectively. Welles, frequently at odds with Seward, was likely prodded into action by the complaints of consul Jackson to the secretary of state.¹

Welles also wondered why Commander A.G. Clary, who had reported seeing a strange light in a fog bank off the coast of Maine and assumed it came from the *Tallahassee*, did not make an effort to engage the vessel. When asked to report on the incident, Clary replied that when he approached the vessel the moon compromised the position of his ship, the USS *Dacotah*, prompting the unidentified vessel to dash away. Moreover, Clary defended his inaction by stating that the *Dacotah* could not match the speed of the *Tallahassee* and, therefore, a chase was pointless. Clary knew firsthand of the *Tallahassee*'s speed as he had pursued the

¹ Welles to Paulding, August 19, 1864, Mortimer M. Jackson to William H. Seward, August 19, 1864, *ORN*, series 1, 3: 157, 156. For the relationship between Seward and Welles, see Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* (New York, 2005), 668-669. Although Goodwin asserts that the relationship between Seward and Welles had improved by the fall 1864, Welles's remarks in his diary tell a different story. Welles always felt that Seward schemed against him and curried favor with Lincoln. See, for example, his diary entry on September 22, 1864, in which Welles suspects that Seward and his close political ally Thurlow Weed have shaped Lincoln's opinions in detriment to Welles. Although Welles's and Seward's relationship may have pacified by autumn 1864, Welles still believed Seward to be "not always truthful, not sensitively scrupulous, but a schemer." Entry of September 22, 1864, *Diary of Gideon Welles* 2: 154-155. Welles's quote comes from p. 155.

vessel, then as the blockade runner *Atalanta*, off Bermuda. A frustrated Welles dismissed Clary's report as another weak excuse.²

Having eluded her pursuers, the *Tallahassee*'s arrival at Halifax marked a turning point for John Taylor Wood. The success he enjoyed over the previous twelve days was offset by frustrating attempts to secure the protection of British authorities and the inability to procure adequate coal to continue his raid. He also feared increased vigilance by the Federal navy. Welles's initial indifference to the raider had given way to a resolve to capture the *Tallahassee*. Capturing a lone vessel at sea, however, was proving to be a most difficult enterprise. In Welles's opinion, the only way to kill a snake was to cut off its head. Rather than wasting time and resources chasing future Confederate raiders, Federal military authorities recommended closing Wilmington, now a base of operations for Confederate commerce raiders. The plan to capture Wilmington remained on hold, though, as military officials were more concerned with Sherman's campaign in Georgia and Grant's operations in Virginia. For the time being, Welles attempted to coordinate the capture of the *Tallahassee*, which he knew was in Halifax. Union officials feared that the British government would allow Wood to bend neutrality stipulations (which called for belligerent vessels in a neutral port to take on only enough coal to return to a home port) and replenish his supply of coal in an effort to continue raiding off of New England.³ Federal officials were wrong, as British administrators did not allow Wood to bend neutrality stipulations for his advantage.

Wood's appearance at Halifax proved to be only the first in a string of setbacks. The commander assumed that he would be welcomed in the British port and allowed ample time to make repairs to the *Tallahassee*. The Confederacy had many friends in Halifax, including

² Welles to Clary, August 30, 1864 & Clary to Welles, September 9, 1864, *ORN*, series 1, 3: 177, 183-184.

³ On the evolution of the Federal plan to take Wilmington, see Fonvielle, *Wilmington Campaign*, 52-54. For Northern fears of British sympathies toward Wood and the *Tallahassee*, see Shingleton, *Sea Ghost*, 134-135.

Confederate agents Benjamin Wier, W.J. Almon, and Alexander Keith. Wood mistakenly believed that they would drum up support among the Haligonians. Aside from the hospitality offered by Wier and a few other pro-Confederate citizens, however, Wood received a cool reception in Halifax. Eight months prior to the *Tallahassee*'s arrival, pirates under the direction of John C. Braine had overtaken the passenger liner *Chesapeake*, out of New York City bound for Portland, Maine and had escaped to Halifax. During the incident, Braine and his fifteen cohorts abducted the *Chesapeake*'s captain and killed the second engineer. Pro-Confederate citizens in Halifax helped Braine make his escape from both British and Union authorities in December 1863. Although Braine was no Confederate officer, he claimed to have taken the *Chesapeake* for the Confederacy. The incident produced charges of British collusion with the Confederate pirates, yet Federal and British authorities managed to quell the uproar arising from the incident before it became explosive. A marked change among Canadians toward the Confederacy became apparent after the *Chesapeake* incident. Sheppardson observed some sympathy for the South, but credited it more to the economic boom in maritime trade, a direct result of Confederate commerce raiders driving American shipping interests to the protection of the British flag. The editor of the *Halifax Sun* did not hide his displeasure with the *Tallahassee*'s appearance, stating that Confederate raiders were nothing more than "thieves, felons, and freebooters." Concerned that pro-Confederate demonstrations might provoke the United States Navy to go after blockade runners operating in and out of Halifax, most citizens had distanced themselves from the Confederacy by the summer of 1864.⁴

⁴ Wood to Mallory, August 31, 1864, *ORN*, series 1, 3: 702; Greg Marquis, *In Armageddon's Shadow: The Civil War and Canada's Maritime Provinces* (Montreal, 1998), 141-145, 168-171, 223; Winks, *Canada and the United States*, 247-251, 254; Bohemian, *Daily Dispatch*, September 23, 1864. Royce Shingleton noted that the *Tallahassee*'s paymaster, Charles Lucian Jones, reported that there was a large crowd to receive the vessel in port, and that some of the officers of the *Tallahassee* attended a ball in the city. There was a contingent of pro-Confederate Haligonians, but this minority became more reticent as Nova Scotia distanced itself from favoring either side in the American Civil War. See Shingleton, *Sea Ghost*, 136, for his take on the reception at Halifax.

Nevertheless, Wood expected Canadian authorities at least to allow him time to do routine maintenance on the *Tallahassee* and procure a sufficient amount of coal to enable him to continue his raiding activities. Wood also hoped that the British navy would protect the *Tallahassee* from Federal vessels that were sure to congregate offshore. Wood met with a “cold and uncivil” reception from British Admiral Sir James Hope when he went aboard Hope’s flagship, the HMS *Duncan*, on August 18 to explain his intentions to obtain coal for the *Tallahassee*. The admiral declined to rise when Wood entered his stateroom, offer him a seat, or even shake his hand. Although offended, Wood discussed neutrality provisions during the brief interview. Hope asked Wood his course of action in the event that he encountered a ship with fraudulent papers under the British flag. Not wanting to overstep his boundaries or make a statement that could be detrimental to Confederate diplomacy, Wood stated that he would determine his action after he had examined the ship’s papers. Hope reminded Wood of Admiral Raphael Semmes’s burning of the *Martaban* in December 1863, a vessel carrying British papers, and stated that the vessel should not have been destroyed, but taken to an English port for adjudication. Wood insisted that such a decision would be made at sea, and circumstances would dictate the outcome. As Hope was unable to squeeze a repudiation of previous Confederate naval practice from Wood during the exchange, the admiral directed Wood to visit Lieutenant Governor Richard Graves MacDonnell to inquire about his stay in port.⁵

⁵ Wood to Mallory, August 31, 1864, Wood to Mallory, September 6, 1864, James Hope to Charles Morris, June 21, 1864, *ORN*, series 1, 3: 702, 705-706, 616-617. Greg Marquis noted that American statesmen were upset that British officials often saluted or returned the salute of Confederate vessels and entertained Confederate officers aboard their ships; early in 1864 the British government instructed its naval officers not to salute Confederate vessels. This is another example of the effort made by the British authorities to distance themselves from the Confederacy. See Marquis, *Armageddon’s Shadow*, 225. The British flag may have protected the *Martaban*, but Semmes concluded the ship’s owner had drawn up a fraudulent sale to protect his vessel. Semmes burned the *Martaban*, and his decision to do so was later upheld during the *Alabama* Claims after the Civil War. See Hearn, *Gray Raiders of the Sea*, 216.

Wood's meeting with MacDonnell was warmer than his reception with Admiral Hope. Under British neutrality laws, a belligerent vessel was offered sanctuary in port for twenty-four hours, unless under duress, and only enough supplies to reach the nearest home port. Wood promised to put to sea as soon as he had procured an adequate amount of coal, although he feared that that might take two or three days to load. MacDonnell reportedly expressed no objection, but Wood found the lieutenant governor anxious that the *Tallahassee* had not left port when he saw him again on August 19. Admiral Hope had informed MacDonnell that 100 tons of coal was sufficient for the *Tallahassee*'s return voyage to Wilmington, despite Wood's protest. MacDonnell remained firm with Wood, however, stating that he had no choice but to defer to Admiral Hope's opinion in such matters.⁶

Upon returning to the *Tallahassee* after a second meeting with MacDonnell, Wood found eleven armed boats sent by Admiral Hope to ensure that only 100 tons of coal be loaded onto the vessel. An offended Wood asked that the boats be pulled back, as they had come from the HMS *Galatea*, in quarantine because of an outbreak of smallpox. The lieutenant governor complied with Wood's request and the boats were removed, but not before several of the *Tallahassee*'s crew had been "enticed off" the ship. Wood asked MacDonnell to have Halifax police officers arrest the deserters or allow officers from the *Tallahassee* to go ashore and arrest the men, but MacDonnell refused.⁷

Why did Hope and MacDonnell react as they did? Concern about Union response certainly influenced their course, especially in the wake of the *Chesapeake* incident. They also had reason to suspect that Wood was in violation of neutrality laws. Mortimer M. Jackson, United States consul at Halifax, made such a claim to British officials. Suspicious that the

⁶ Wood, "Tallahassee's Dash," 414; Wood to Mallory, August 31, 1864, *ORN*, series 1, 3: 702; Shingleton, *Sea Ghost*, 137.

⁷ Wood, "Tallahassee's Dash," 414; Wood to Mallory, August 31, 1864, *ORN*, series 1, 3: 702.

Tallahassee was really at Halifax to obtain coal to continue attacks on Union commerce, Jackson demanded that the Confederate vessel be detained until he could offer proof that Wood was in violation of both municipal and international law. Jackson believed that Wood hoped to procure munitions to rearm his ship, which was a clear breach of neutrality.⁸

In Washington, the British minister to the United States, Lord Lyons, discussed the *Tallahassee*'s presence in Halifax with William Seward, who considered the presence of the *Tallahassee* at Halifax a "matter for very serious consideration." Seward inquired about rumors of the *Tallahassee* being outfitted in Bermuda, and another report that claimed a Confederate agent had ordered a compass and 3,000 barrels of pork from New York to be put onboard the *Tallahassee* at Halifax. He warned Lyons that the vessel's appearance in Halifax would only increase tensions between Great Britain and the United States. At Seward's insistence, Lyons sent word to MacDonnell that the United States government "appeared to be a good deal disturbed by the visit of the *Tallahassee* in Halifax."⁹

While MacDonnell initially approved Wood's request that he be given two to three days to load coal onto the *Tallahassee*, the lieutenant governor changed his mind when pressured by Jackson and Lyons. He believed he had no legal right to detain Wood and his men, as Jackson had no tangible proof that the Confederates had violated neutrality laws. But Lyon's message carrying Seward's backhanded rebuke of British authorities for allowing a pirate into Halifax compelled MacDonnell to reconsider his position. MacDonnell got word from the docks that the *Tallahassee* had already taken 180 tons of coal on board, far in excess of what was deemed a reasonable amount for the return trip to Wilmington. Growing increasingly concerned about an

⁸ M.M. Jackson to Seward, August 18, 1864, Jackson to Seward, August 19, 1864, MacDonnell to Edward Cardwell, August 18, 1864, *ORN*, series 1, 3: 152, 156, 706.

⁹ Lyons to Lord John Russell, August 19, 1864, James J. Barnes & Patience P. Barnes, eds., *The American Civil War through British Eyes: Dispatches from British Diplomats*, 3 vols. (Kent, Ohio, 2003) 3: 205-206.

aggressive Union response to the *Tallahassee*, a vessel that was five knots faster than the “most formidable adversary which the Federal commerce had yet encountered,” the *Alabama*, MacDonnell determined to remove any excess coal that had been loaded onto the raider. MacDonnell figured that as little as five extra tons of coal would enable Wood to continue his raid against Union shipping.¹⁰

The lieutenant governor was relieved to learn that, contrary to reports, Wood had not taken on extra coal. Perhaps because Wood had kept his word about the quantity of coal he would procure, MacDonnell granted the Confederate commander an extra twelve hours in port in order to obtain a new mainmast. MacDonnell’s observance of neutrality laws probably kept Wood from attempting to obtain additional coal during the extra twelve hours he was granted. By retracting his original agreement to allow the *Tallahassee* to stay in port two or three days, MacDonnell made it clear that he was not going to cave in on the application of British neutrality merely to suit Wood.¹¹

Feeling snubbed by British authorities, and mindful that United States cruisers were undoubtedly making course for Halifax, Wood thought it best to get back to sea as soon as possible. Wood hired a pilot in Halifax who navigated the *Tallahassee* through a seldom-used eastern inlet to the Atlantic Ocean and eluded Federal steamers in the vicinity in the early morning of August 20.¹² According to international maritime law, Union ships could not

¹⁰ MacDonnell to Cardwell, August 23, 1864, *ORN*, series 1, 3: 708-709.

¹¹ MacDonnell to Cardwell, August 23, 1864, *ORN*, series 1, 3: 708-709; Shingleton, *Sea Ghost*, 137-138. My interpretation of official British reaction relies heavily upon the findings of Howard Jones in his *Union in Peril: The Crisis over British Intervention in the Civil War*. On p. 229, Jones noted that had the British intervened in the American Civil War, the South would have won recognition in Europe and opposition to the Lincoln administration would have increased in vigor. The British managed to effectively check Northern bellicosity and stamped out an effective path of diplomacy, regardless of possible attempts at British-United States embroilment, which it appears Wood may have had in mind at Halifax in August 1864.

¹² John Bell guessed that no Federal ships were in the vicinity when Wood made his escape through the eastern passage, but failed to consider that MacDonnell himself reported that the USS *Pontoosuc* entered port at Halifax less than twelve hours after the *Tallahassee* left, with five other vessels hovering offshore. The *Pontoosuc* and the other

blockade neutral ports. Union cruisers lurked in the vicinity, however, and one, the *Pontoosuc*, actually entered Halifax harbor as she searched for the *Tallahassee*. The commander of the *Pontoosuc*, George A. Stevens, disregarded maritime law by refusing to wait twenty-four hours before departing the neutral port. Lieutenant Commander Stevens had also failed to report his arrival to Admiral Hope, prompting MacDonnell to issue a proclamation that any vessel from either belligerent must report in at the Halifax Navy Yard and respect British neutrality. MacDonnell was put in a delicate position. The Northern press chastised the lieutenant governor for allowing Confederate vessels to enter the port, while the *Tallahassee*'s officers complained that MacDonnell had not observed neutrality laws. "British neutrality!" spat Sheppardson, the *Tallahassee*'s surgeon. "I stood on the deck, in the moonlight, thinking of the strange neutrality that works only against one side." MacDonnell's actions, however, were judicious. Tensions between the United States and Britain had eased since early in the war, when a conflict between the two powers seemed a very real possibility. A subtle rapprochement between the two nations after 1863 kept incidents such as the *Tallahassee*'s stay in Halifax from igniting the passions of the Lincoln administration and Lord Palmerston's council.¹³

That MacDonnell reacted the way he did was significant. It revealed British determination to maintain a levelheaded stance in the American war, even as doubts persisted of

vessels may not have been in port at Halifax, but they were in the immediate vicinity and posed a real threat to Wood. For Bell's assertion see *Confederate Seadog*, 36-37. For MacDonnell's claim see MacDonnell to Cardwell, August 23, 1864, *ORN*, series 1, 3: 707-708.

¹³ Wood, "*Tallahassee*'s Dash," 415-416; MacDonnell to Cardwell, August 31, 1864, Extract from the Minutes of the Executive Council, August 29, 1864, George A. Stevens to Welles, August 30, 1864, *ORN*, series 1, 3: 708, 295, 176-177; Bohemian, *Daily Dispatch*, September 23, 1864. Mary Elizabeth Thomas termed the *Tallahassee*'s cruise as a "factor in Anglo-American relations." This writer agrees that the cruise was a factor, albeit a factor of fleeting importance. Had Wood violated the provisions of neutrality and taken on more coal and carried out an extended cruise, the incident would have gained import in the relations of the United States and Great Britain. MacDonnell's careful course, though, impeded Confederate breach of neutrality, and his attempt to check the Federal breach of neutrality actually resulted in an expression of regret from United States secretary of state William Seward, further placating tensions between the two nations. Thomas discussed the career of the *Tallahassee* after its conversion back to a merchant vessel as a means of eroding Anglo-American relations, but this writer sees the case as being handled carefully by the officials of both countries. For her findings, see Thomas, "The CSS *Tallahassee*: A Factor in Anglo-American Relations, 1864-1866," 148-159.

the Union's ability to defeat the Confederacy. Conservatives in Great Britain viewed the war as proof of democracy's inherent flaws and hoped to reestablish a large British influence in North America at war's end. A prolonged Civil War might create a vacuum in North America that could be filled by European powers. The French were already scheming to increase their influence in North America by supporting an imperial government in Mexico, and British imperialists hoped their country, too, would take similar actions. British sympathy for the Confederacy masked latent British imperialist designs.¹⁴

Other conservatives viewed the South as a sovereign nation upholding British aristocratic ideals and doubted the sincerity of the Union's claim that the war was prosecuted to destroy slavery. British conservatives largely saw the war as one of Northern imperialism. As late as the summer of 1864, even those Britons who supported the Union grew concerned that the South could not be defeated. "I have been much disappointed with the result so far of the Virginia campaign," a sullen Richard Cobden wrote to Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts. Cobden, who hoped that the war confirmed American emancipation efforts, observed that Robert E. Lee's smaller Army of Northern Virginia had checked Ulysses S. Grant's operational armies in Virginia. Moreover, the Confederate summer offensive led by General Jubal Early had menaced Washington and increased fear in the North. "All this of course tends to confirm nine-tenths of our politicians here in their belief that the success of the North is impossible," Cobden stated.¹⁵

The Confederacy's offensive thrusts, including Wood's coastal raid, were not enough to change the opinions of British leaders. No matter how uncertain the Union cause, most British

¹⁴ Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy*, 87-88, 202, 310-311; Donald Bellows, "A Study of British Conservative Reaction to the American Civil War," *The Journal of Southern History* 51, no. 4 (November 1985): 505-526.

¹⁵ McPherson, *Battle Cry*, 548-554; Bellows, "British Reaction," 517-520; Richard Cobden to Charles Sumner, August 18, 1864, "The Letters of Richard Cobden to Charles Sumner, 1862-1865," *The American Historical Review* 2, No. 2 (January 1897): 306-319. Cobden's quotes come from p. 315.

policymakers refused to abrogate neutrality and support the Confederacy. Patience won out over impulse, and as the August 1864 cruise of the *Tallahassee* ended, the reality that Great Britain was not going to support the slaveholding republic was confirmed.¹⁶

Wood managed to evade Federal cruisers near Halifax on August 20, but realized that his cruise would have to be cut short because of a lack of coal. Unable to menace the northeastern coast any longer, Wood now plotted a course for Wilmington. He flirted with the idea of making for Bermuda to try to obtain additional coal there, but learned yellow fever had infected the island and did not want to risk the chance of he or his crew contracting the deadly disease. Unable to stray too far off course, Wood destroyed only one commerce vessel during his return voyage to Wilmington. Other than that, the trip was mostly “uneventful,” save for the nighttime dash back through the blockade of Wilmington on the night of August 25. In his official report to the secretary of the navy, Wood accounted for sixteen vessels burned, ten scuttled, five bonded, and two released. Although successful on paper, the cruise left Wood disappointed. He had intended on raiding along the Delaware capes on his return trip, but insufficient fuel altered his plan.¹⁷

The *Tallahassee*’s safe return to Wilmington offered Southerners a chance to gloat at the Federal failure to capture the raider. The *Goldsboro* (NC) *Journal* chided the Union navy, warning that John Taylor Wood and the *Tallahassee* were prepared to make another raid. “Let them look out for her again,” the editor cautioned. Public joy in the South over Wood’s cruise, however, was soon overshadowed by other factors.¹⁸

¹⁶ McPherson, *Battle Cry*, 548-554. Confederate diplomatic realists such as John Newland Maffitt were indeed right in their assumptions that as long as the Confederacy condoned slavery, international opinion was against the nation. It is debatable whether Wood envisioned embroiling the Union and Great Britain through his actions at Halifax, but it is clear through his contemporary correspondence that he thought official British reaction would be more sympathetic to his efforts.

¹⁷ Wood, “*Tallahassee*’s Dash,” 416; Wood to Mallory, August 31, 1864, *ORN*, series 1, 3: 703.

¹⁸ *Wilmington Daily Journal*, August 30, 1864 (report taken from the *Goldsboro* (NC) *Journal*).

The inability of the Federal navy to destroy the *Tallahassee* seemed to pay dividends, as a feeling of despondency pervaded the North. In a private letter to British foreign secretary Earl Russell, Lord Lyons mentioned growing Northern angst over the ineffectiveness of the United States Navy Department in dealing with the *Tallahassee*. Associating the success of the Confederate cruiser with renunciations of Lincoln's war policy, Lyons described the incumbent president's chances for reelection as "vanishing." "Mr. Lincoln's star is very pale," Lyons claimed. The British minister's intuition told him that a major Union military victory would turn the tide of war and shift Northerners peace protests to a more rigorous prosecution of the war.¹⁹ Still waiting for a significant triumph on the battlefield, the minister and the rest of the North anxiously awaited news from Chicago to see what course of action the Democratic Party would take in the upcoming presidential election.

The effects of John Taylor Wood's cruise seemed to validate the Copperhead's claims that brokering peace was the only way to resolve the war between the Union and the Confederacy. The Copperheads were able to control the Democratic meeting. Largely through the efforts of the ultra-conservative peace advocate Clement Vallandigham, a peace platform was adopted which called the war a failure and left the door open for a permanent separation of North and South. George B. McClellan, the deposed former commander of Lincoln's army, was named the Democratic candidate on August 31. George Pendleton, a close ally of Vallandigham, was selected as McClellan's running mate.²⁰

Southerners placed high hopes in McClellan's candidacy as a viable alternative to Lincoln for Northern voters. The Confederate offensive during the summer of 1864 seemed to

¹⁹ Lyons to Russell, August 15, 1864 & Lyons to Russell, August 23, 1864, James J. Barnes and Patience P. Barnes, eds., *Private and Confidential: Letters from British Ministers in Washington to the Foreign Secretaries in London, 1844-1867* (Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania, 1993), 347.

²⁰ Stephen W. Sears, *George B. McClellan: The Young Napoleon* (New York, 1988), 371-377; Klement, *Copperheads in the Middle West*, 235-241.

reap a major political boon when news of the Democratic convention reached the South. Meanwhile, in Washington, D.C., Lincoln feared the worst. His defeat at the polls would signal a repudiation of both the effort to preserve the Union and emancipation. Toward the end of August Lincoln considered sending Henry J. Raymond, *New York Times* editor and Republican power broker, to Richmond on an official mission to explore Confederate conditions for peace. Lincoln never considered two separate nations a viable condition for peace; “Union and the national authority” were his stipulations for the cessation of hostilities, with “all remaining questions to be left for adjustment by peaceful modes.” Still, the Confederacy held some leverage should negotiations be undertaken at this point. Lee’s army defiantly stood outside of Richmond, Sherman was stymied in Georgia, and Wood had confounded the Federal navy. The military situation, coupled with the mood of the North, left Lincoln with a dim outlook. Agonizing over the situation, Lincoln decided against sending Raymond to Richmond.²¹

The result of Wood’s mission and the Confederate summer offensive unraveled in early September 1864. Any political windfall that might benefit the Confederate bid for independence was soon lost once Lincoln’s hopes for a major victory on the battlefield were confirmed in early September 1864. William Sherman captured Atlanta, Georgia on September 2, 1864, virtually ending any possibility of Confederate independence while reinvigorating support for President Lincoln among Northerners. Less than a week after the *Tallahassee*’s raid and triumphant return to Wilmington, Confederate prospects for independence were all but gone. “The loss of Vicksburg, upon the frontier of the Confederacy, was nothing in comparison with Atlanta,” one

²¹ Harris, *Lincoln’s Last Months*, 16-17; Lincoln to Raymond, August 24, 1864, *CWL* 7:517. No consensus has been reached on why Lincoln decided not to send Raymond to Richmond in late August 1864. William C. Harris suggested that sending Raymond would abandon the Federal stance on emancipation and therefore, may have left Lincoln with a guilty conscious. Perhaps Lincoln had unflinching hope in his military, as the Federal war effort had survived similar conditions in mid to late 1862.

Confederate naval officer lamented.²² The results of the Union military victory lifted Northern morale and diminished the chances of election for McClellan.

News of the Federal victory in Georgia virtually rendered the Copperhead peace platform obsolete less than two weeks after it was adopted. In fact, McClellan repudiated the peace platform in his acceptance letter of September 8, asserting that “the Union must be preserved at all hazards.” As a former soldier, McClellan could not abandon his comrades who had sacrificed their lives for the Union.²³

Southerners, Davis and Wood foremost among them, were disappointed by McClellan’s stance, which seemed to end their hopes for negotiated Confederate independence. A Confederate War Department clerk commented that McClellan’s acceptance letter “casts a deeper gloom over our croakers.” A Northern newspaper correspondent observed the divide in the South over McClellan’s nomination, with Southerners fearful that neither Northern candidate even considered Confederate independence a practical solution to the war. After the fall of Atlanta and McClellan’s repudiation of the Chicago peace platform, Davis abandoned hope that legitimate offensive warfare, like the raid of the *Tallahassee*, could secure independence. He instead turned to secret agents in Canada, keeping the vain hope that a terror campaign could influence the electoral process in the North. A divided Democratic Party all but reassured Lincoln’s reelection, placing the Confederate president on the defensive, both on the battlefield and the home front after August 1864.²⁴

²² McPherson, *Battle Cry*, 774-775; George Gift to Ellen Gift, July 24, 1864, Gift Papers, SHC.

²³ William C. Harris, “Conservative Unionists and the Presidential Election of 1864,” *Civil War History* 38, No. 4 (December 1992): 298-318; McClellan to the Democratic Nomination Committee, September 8, 1864, Stephen W. Sears, ed., *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan: Selected Correspondence, 1860-1865* (New York, 1989), 595-597.

²⁴ Entry for September 13, 1864, *Rebel War Clerk’s Diary*, 419; *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, October 1, 1864; David E. Long, “‘I Say We Can Control That Election,’” 111-129. On p. 124 Long stated that had the Democratic convention taken place a week later, with news of the Atlanta victory available to Copperheads, the

The impact of the fall of Atlanta was not lost on Lincoln. The groundswell of support throughout the North after the Federal victory gave the incumbent president a mandate to continue prosecuting the war. No longer forced to salvage a battered coalition of war supporters, Lincoln proclaimed a day of thanksgiving for the preservation of national existence in the face of “the insurgent rebels who so long have been waging a cruel war against the Government of the United States.” Indicative of the changing Northern perception of the war, one newspaper suggested that the “only available negotiators for peace are such masters of diplomacy as Gens. Grant and Sherman, and that invincible seafaring ambassador, Admiral Farragut.”²⁵ Any diplomatic leverage that the Confederacy had obtained was now gone; Lincoln and the Republicans held the advantage in the event of further negotiations for peace, and the president never again doubted his war aims.

Another unforeseen result of Wood’s cruising off the coast of New York and New England in August 1864 was a renewed vigor in the United States Navy and Gideon Welles. The Union navy’s search for the *Tallahassee* had proven futile, generating sharp criticism of the Navy Department by the Northern press. Yet Gideon Welles had for some time argued that the port of Wilmington must be closed. Wilmington was the last open Confederate port for blockade runners and commerce raiders. The military value of the port increased in Northern circles, as it was not only a haven for Confederate supplies, but also a base for offensive operations against Union merchantmen. Welles viewed Wilmington as equally important as Richmond to the Confederate war effort and complained in his diary that Secretary of War Edwin Stanton had for months dragged his feet in endorsing a coordinated attack against the Carolina seaport. Welles

Copperheads would have worked in collusion with Confederate agents to assault prison camps in the upper Midwest out of desperation and in the hopes of fanning the dying flames of discontent.

²⁵ Proclamation of Thanksgiving and Prayer, September 3, 1864, CWL 7: 533-534; *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, September 3, 1864.

suspected that other cabinet members were also working against him. At a late August cabinet meeting, Welles was questioned about the pursuit of the *Tallahassee*. While making his reply, Welles observed Secretary of the Treasury William Pitt Fessenden whispering into Lincoln's ear. Feeling disrespected, Welles left the meeting shortly thereafter. He noted in his diary that his adversary William Seward had built a cabal against him that railroaded his initiatives.²⁶

Welles's vigor was renewed by the raid of the *Tallahassee*, the condemnation by the Northern press, and his own insecurity about his position in the cabinet. Concerned that more raiders might use Wilmington as a base of operations, Welles offered extra naval protection to commercial ships. Welles provided additional security for convoys of ships bearing California gold which were threatened by Confederate raiders. "This arrangement will conduce to the confidence of the traveling public," shipping magnate Cornelius Vanderbilt agreed, "as well as to the shippers of treasure."²⁷

Welles also gave more explicit instructions to his cruisers in search of raiders. Good communication was vital, prompting the secretary to instruct his gunboat commanders to telegraph from each and every port they entered to keep the department abreast of their precise location. Only if the vessel's commander believed it was absolutely necessary were they to wait for a reply. Checking in made it easier for the department to coordinate its efforts and track the movements of Confederate raiders. "Be economical in the use of coal," Welles implored, until the cruisers had a piratical vessel in sight, "where speed and dispatch are essential and important." Last, all cruiser commanders were to report on the length of time spent under steam

²⁶ Entry for August 30, 1864 and August 25, 1864, *Diary of Gideon Welles* 2: 127-129, 119-120.

²⁷ Welles to Vanderbilt, August 31, 1864, Vanderbilt to Welles, September 1, 1864, *ORN*, series 1, 3: 179, 181.

and sail, as well as the vessels they encountered. Welles wanted to implement a more uniform policy for chasing Confederate raiders like the *Tallahassee*.²⁸

The number of Federal blockaders off Wilmington was also increased. With Mobile Bay now sealed off to blockade runners and Atlanta in Federal hands, the Union high command could now turn its sights on Wilmington. As Welles had long advocated, a joint army-navy expedition was finally planned in early September 1864 to strike the North Carolina seaport. Welles selected Admiral David Dixon Porter to lead the naval task force in the attack. As the expedition was being organized, Welles's strengthened blockade at Wilmington was paying dividends. "The cruiser Tallahassee having run into Wilmington, the port is now effectually closed by an accumulation of blockaders," a Confederate official observed. By November 1864 it became apparent that the Federal navy had both the means to assemble a blockading force at Wilmington and pursue any Confederate raiders that attempted to menace Union shipping. One Union sailor stationed aboard the USS *Wabash* informed his parents in Boston that his vessel was to be part of the fleet that would soon attack Wilmington. Even so, there were still plenty of Federal cruisers available to hunt down the "pirates," he assured them.²⁹

In an ironic twist, John Taylor Wood's campaign to whip up discontent in the North had the opposite effect. Dismayed by the increased Federal blockading fleet, Confederate officials in Wilmington began to complain to Jefferson Davis. Wilmingtonians fretted about the safety of their city, as the port became a major target of Federal military forces. Those fears were not new. As early as March 1862, residents of Wilmington worried that Union forces under General Ambrose Burnside planned to attack the city. Portions of eastern North Carolina had recently

²⁸ Welles to Silas H. Stringham, Hiram Paulding, and Cornelius K. Stribling, August 25, 1864, *ORN*, series 1, 3: 168.

²⁹ Fonvielle, *Wilmington Campaign*, 61-66; Entry for September 7, 1864, *Rebel War Clerk's Diary*, 417-418; William Read to Father and Mother, November [no date], 1864, William Read Papers, Perkins Library, Duke University.

fallen into Union hands, including New Bern and Beaufort. The Federal war machine appeared poised to next strike Wilmington, and officials feared that Union spies were walking the streets.³⁰

General Burnside's attack on Wilmington did not materialize in 1862, as Union commanders and administrators viewed other theaters of operations, especially Virginia, more important than North Carolina. Consequently, Burnside's resources were transferred elsewhere after the spring of 1862. Wood's 1864 cruise, however, provoked the Union high command to once again target Wilmington for capture. This time, the attack was a certainty.³¹

Wilmingtonians got word of the impending attack on their city. John Taylor Wood's mission was soon transformed from a source of Southern pride to one of deep concern for residents in Wilmington. Samuel J. Person, a representative from New Hanover County in the North Carolina General Assembly, argued that the cruise of the *Tallahassee* produced an adverse effect, increasing Northern popular support to close the port. Person deemed the Davis administration's commerce raiding policy ill conceived and detrimental to the Confederacy. "[S]uch vessels can do but little good so far as general military results are concerned," Person grumbled to President Davis. "[T]heir depredations upon the enemy's shipping particularly of the smaller class has excited or will excite a degree of popular indignation in the Yankee mind," Person continued, "the purpose of which will convince their rulers to send an expedition against this place [Wilmington]."³²

In Person's opinion, a Federal expedition would not have been considered had the *Tallahassee* not embarked from Wilmington. Person claimed that North Carolina Governor Zebulon Vance, Confederate Attorney General George Davis, and various military commanders,

³⁰ Wilmington Committee of Safety to Jefferson Davis, March 28, 1862, Davis Papers, PLDU; Barrett, *Civil War in North Carolina*, 66-130, 10-11.

³¹ Barrett, *Civil War in North Carolina*, 128-130.

³² Samuel J. Person to Davis, November 12, 1864, Davis Papers, PLDU.

including General Robert E. Lee and General W.H.C. Whiting, in command at Wilmington, held the same view. Person's constituents asked him to voice displeasure with the commerce raiding policy in the upcoming session of the state legislature. Person informed Davis that he planned to do just that, albeit in secret session.³³

"Experience has taught me to expect of Gov. Vance unjust constructions of my conduct," Davis snapped back at Person. Davis was adamant in his defense of John Taylor Wood, the cruise of the *Tallahassee*, and Secretary of the Navy Stephen Mallory. In Davis's view, he had little choice but to deploy the *Tallahassee* after Britain disallowed the procurement of additional raiding vessels like the *Alabama* and *Florida*, which had destroyed approximately three-fourths of the Federal merchant marine in 1863-1864. Davis figured the *Tallahassee* rendered no service for Wilmington's protection; the vessel's true value to the Confederacy was as a commerce raider, and if not employed in such a manner the "ocean will soon be white with the sails of Yankee Merchantmen, giving new impetus to the commerce of the enemy, and fresh energy to his resources."³⁴

As far as Davis was concerned, the cruise of the *Tallahassee* had not led to a tightened blockade of Wilmington. If more blockade runners were being captured it was because all other Confederate ports had been closed or captured over the course of the war. If anything, Davis believed, the blockade at Wilmington had actually loosened, as Federal ships were drawn away to chase the *Tallahassee*. The redeployment of speedy Union cruisers enabled twelve blockade runners to enter Wilmington in a twelve-day period, according to the president's calculations. Davis did not doubt that Person and Vance were loyal to the Confederate cause, but he chastised both of them for criticizing his naval policy at a time of serious concern for the Confederacy. "It

³³ Samuel J. Person to Davis, November 12, 1864, Davis Papers, PLDU.

³⁴ Davis to Person, December 15, 1864, *PJD* 11:226-233.

is easy to see the sad and disastrous results which must ensue” if all Southerners did not work together to fend off the threat of invasion, Davis reasoned.³⁵

Davis clearly advocated an aggressive commerce raiding policy, as did Stephen Mallory and John Taylor Wood. Lincoln’s reelection in November 1864 lessened the political value of such waterborne operations, but Davis still held out hope for peace and independence. “Our only hope of peace, beyond the achievements of our noble Armies in the field, must lie in making the burdens of the war oppressive to the people of the North,” Davis claimed. Davis argued that vessels like the *Tallahassee* were not equipped to defend Wilmington. “The *Tallahassee* is not a fighting ship,” one crew member explained. Echoing Davis’s view of the vessel, the sailor stated that the *Tallahassee* was “of more value to us [as a raider] than is twenty of the best vessels in the Yankee navy to that government.”³⁶

Davis’s premonition about the effectiveness of light raiders for defensive purpose was correct. The raider CSS *Chickamauga* could offer little more than token resistance to the overwhelming firepower of about sixty Union gunboats in the naval task force that attacked Wilmington in the winter of 1864-1865. As it turned out, Lincoln’s reelection was not affected by the cruise of the *Tallahassee*, or by the subsequent and less successful cruises of the CSS *Chickamauga* and yet another mission by the *Tallahassee*, now renamed the *Olustee*.³⁷ The August 1864 cruise of the *Tallahassee* turned out to be the only cruise by a commerce raider from Wilmington that served any real purpose. After the fall of Atlanta, Davis might have better

³⁵ Davis to Person, December 15, 1864, *PJD* 11: 226-233.

³⁶ Davis to Person, December 15, 1864, *PJD* 11: 228; Richmond *Sentinel*, December 5, 1864.

³⁷ Fonvielle, *The Wilmington Campaign*, 323; Hearn, *Gray Raiders of the Sea*, 139-141. William Ward, Wood’s lieutenant on the August 1864 cruise, took over command of the *Olustee*. Wood returned to administrative duties as Jefferson Davis’s aide-de-camp shortly after the cruise.

employed such ships as blockade runners. The continuation of raiding operations out of Wilmington merely gave more impetus to the Northern desire to close the port.³⁸

Conditions on the Northern home front improved in autumn 1864. A new Federal fiscal policy met little serious resistance in September of that year, and the availability of large enlistment bounties, together with progress on the battlefield, bolstered the number of Union volunteers. New York newspapers revealed the change. During the summer most of the New York newspapers severely criticized the Lincoln administration's ineffectiveness in dealing with the *Tallahassee*. Instead of focusing their complaints on Lincoln, New York editors now denounced the Confederate raiders themselves. In September 1864, the *New York Times* printed William Sheppardson's account of the *Tallahassee*'s cruise. Filled with invective against the Lincoln administration, Sheppardson's goal was probably to have his report picked up by the Northern press and help spread despair and discontent throughout the region. The *Times* ran the article, but mocked Sheppardson's denigration of Lincoln and his praise of John Taylor Wood. After reading Sheppardson's account, one pilot captured by Wood sent a letter to the *Times* claiming that he was never treated as well as the surgeon alleged. The pilot was also quick to point out that he never belittled the Lincoln government, as Sheppardson had suggested.³⁹

Northerners, for the most part, were unified in their support of Lincoln's war policies by autumn 1864. In North Carolina, however, the harmony that Jefferson Davis believed was necessary to fend off the imminent Federal invasion was crumbling. Zebulon Vance was no less devoted to Southern independence than Jefferson Davis. By the time the Federal invasion of

³⁸ In fact, the *Olustee* was reconverted to a blockade runner and renamed the *Chameleon* in December 1864. Captain John Wilkinson, future business partner of John Taylor Wood in Halifax, commanded the *Olustee*. After picking up supplies at Bermuda, Wilkinson attempted to reenter Wilmington and Charleston but was unable to due to the increased Federal blockade. Wilkinson directed the vessel to Great Britain instead. See Shingleton, *Sea Ghost*, 143.

³⁹ Lyons to Russell, September 16, 1864, *Private and Confidential*, 348-349; *New York Times*, September 29 & 30, 1864.

Wilmington occurred in late December, Vance had implored every available citizen who could shoulder arms help stave off the attack, promising to meet them at the front and “share the worst.” The bickering between Davis and Vance over the *Tallahassee* reflected their different approaches, though shared commitment to obtaining Confederate sovereignty. Davis refused to waiver in his belief that an offensive naval policy was a suitable way to impress the North that the Confederacy would not be vanquished before sovereignty was assured. Vance, on the other hand, urged the Confederate president to employ raiders like the *Tallahassee* for defensive rather than offensive purposes. Resolute in the face of mounting opposition, Davis held firm to his belief that the raiders were beneficial to the Confederate war effort.⁴⁰ The quarrel between Davis and Vance led to similar disagreements between Confederate army and navy policymakers.

The August 1864 cruise of the CSS *Tallahassee* aggravated existing tensions between the Confederate army and navy at Wilmington and further strained the relationship between President Davis and General W.H.C. Whiting. Whiting vehemently disagreed with Davis over the value of commerce raiding. The Cape Fear Department commander feared that the *Tallahassee*’s activities would only increase Federal vigilance on the blockade and the likelihood that Wilmington would become a target for attack. In Whiting’s opinion, the havoc wreaked by Wood provoked Northern anger against the Confederate commerce raiding policy rather than anger against Lincoln. In fact, Whiting held Wood responsible for bringing “the whole pressure of the Northern press to bear upon” Wilmington. The general also blamed Davis’s policy of commerce raiding for the capture of several blockade runners, insisting that Wood had commandeered valuable smokeless coal for the *Tallahassee*. Using inferior coal, blockade runners were forced to run the blockade at Wilmington spewing dark, black smoke. As far as

⁴⁰ Mobley, “War Governor of the South,” 219-222; Gordon McKinney, *Zeb Vance: North Carolina’s Civil War Governor and Gilded Age Political Leader* (Chapel Hill, 2004), 235-244; Vance to Davis, October 14, 1864, Zebulon B. Vance, Proclamation, December 20, 1864, *OR*, series 1, 42, part 3: 1148-1149, 1284-1285.

Whiting was concerned, the loss of the blockade runner *Advance* on September 9, 1864 along with six other steamers shortly after the *Tallahassee*'s cruise was not worth the "burning of a few ships and smacks on the coast of New England."⁴¹

Growing anxious about a purported Federal invasion of the Cape Fear, Whiting strongly objected to the fitting out of commerce raiders at Wilmington. Like his Union adversaries, Whiting saw the *Tallahassee* as a privateer, and charged that the vessel threatened the relative amity between the army and navy at Wilmington. He believed that if the *Tallahassee* was not suitable for the defense of Wilmington, then the ship's crew should be placed in shore batteries to help defend the city. Whiting's views fell upon the deaf ears of Confederate Secretary of War James Seddon, who forwarded the general's letter to Davis.⁴²

Davis bristled at Whiting's opinions regarding the CSS *Tallahassee* and accused him of overstepping his authority. Whiting's audacity provoked Davis, at least in part, to replace him as commander of the Department of the Cape Fear in October 1864. Davis sent General Braxton Bragg to Wilmington to supersede Whiting. Rather than work in tandem with Whiting, who was well respected by his soldiers, Bragg relegated the deposed commander to second-in-command. With Wilmington now threatened, Whiting did not take the time to choose his words judiciously when complaining to the War Department. Whiting's rash outbursts, along with his previous quarrels with Davis, led to his demotion. Davis supported the efforts of his nephew John Taylor Wood, and believed that Whiting's remarks were insubordinate. Rather than cooperate with Whiting to assure Wilmington's safety, Davis replaced him with a general officer straddled with a shaky war record. Davis charged Whiting with intensifying the friction between the army and

⁴¹ Johns, "Wilmington During the Blockade," 500; Wise, *Lifeline of the Confederacy*, 199-200; Whiting to Beauregard, August 31, 1864, Whiting to Lee, September 24, 1864, *OR*, series 1, 42, part 2: 1212-1213, 1280-1282; Whiting to Mallory, October 6, 1864, *OR*, series 1, 42, part 3: 1137-1138.

⁴² Whiting to Seddon, October 11, 1864, *OR*, series 1, 42, part 3: 1146-1148.

navy at Wilmington, but tampering with the command structure at Wilmington probably caused greater damage to the morale of Confederate troops in the department.⁴³

Despite the objections to commerce raiding entered by Person, Vance, and Whiting, Stephen Mallory and James Seddon wholeheartedly sustained Davis's policy and Wood's actions. "[T]he destruction of the coasting trade would be one of the most impressive measures of offense we could adopt against the enemy, and would reach especially the class of their people who have heretofore profited rather than suffered by the war," Seddon explained to Robert E. Lee, who also harbored doubts about the commerce raiding policy. Fearful that an attack on the vital supply line through Wilmington would hurt his army's ability to maintain resistance, Lee suggested transferring the base of raiding operations to Charleston, South Carolina. Lee's suggestion was ignored, and raiding out of Wilmington continued through the remainder of 1864. Not even the protests of the one man whose military opinion Davis most respected changed the Confederate president's thoughts on offensive naval operations.⁴⁴

Did Wood's cruise ultimately lead to the fall of Wilmington in February 1865? Historian Stephen Wise noted that in the months following the raid of the *Tallahassee*, the Federal captures of blockade runners at Wilmington increased 20%, whereas the previous three months saw only a 10% loss of blockade running attempts.⁴⁵ The stepped up presence of Union blockading vessels certainly had something to do with the *Tallahassee*. One must consider the bigger picture, though. The loss of Mobile Bay in early August 1864 meant one less target for the Federal navy to worry about. More resources could now be assigned to Wilmington for

⁴³ Endorsement of Jefferson Davis, October 21, 1864, *OR*, series 1, 42, part 3: 1146-1148; Fonvielle, *The Wilmington Campaign*, 82-87; Steven E. Woodworth, *Davis and Lee at War* (Lawrence, Kansas, 1995), 82-84; Entry for December 28, 1864, Sarah Woolfolk Wiggins, ed., *The Journals of Josiah Gorgas, 1857-1858* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama, 1995), 145-146.

⁴⁴ Lee to Seddon, September 22, 1864, Seddon to Lee, September 23, 1864, *ORN*, series 1, 10: 747-748.

⁴⁵ Wise, *Lifeline of the Confederacy*, 200-201.

blockading and bombardment. In addition, the Federal victory at Atlanta in early September 1864 meant that Union army and navy forces could set their sights on Wilmington. Military victories sustained Lincoln's prosecution of the war and increased the mandate to crush the rebellion, making Wilmington a key target. Gideon Welles had long advocated an attack on Wilmington, and finally convinced the rest of the Lincoln administration to support it by the fall of 1864. In that sense, the *Tallahassee* had only a negligible effect on the fall of Wilmington, which probably would have been attacked anyway.

The cumulative effect of the *Tallahassee*'s cruise must be considered as well. The surge of support across the North for the war's prosecution in the fall of 1864 was due in part to the Wood raid. Wilmington was no longer simply a haven for blockade runners. Viewed as a hub for rebel pirates among Northerners after the cruise of the *Tallahassee*, the seaport constituted a direct threat to civilians and maritime interests in the North.

The August 1864 cruise of the *Tallahassee* produced results opposite to those John Taylor Wood and President Davis had hoped to obtain. Any Northern political dissonance resulting from the raid vanished after the fall of Atlanta, the Democratic Party's peace platform had been rejected by its presidential candidate, and tensions among Confederate leaders increased. Rather than securing Confederate independence, the cruise of the *Tallahassee* helped make Wilmington a target of Union forces, fully supported by Northern politicians and people.

CHAPTER FIVE-CONCLUSION

General Lee's premonition that the fate of the Army of Northern Virginia and the Confederacy depended upon Wilmington remaining open as a seaport proved to be true. Fort Fisher, the principal stronghold guarding Wilmington, fell to Union forces on January 15, 1865. The network of forts protecting Wilmington proved to be no match for the superior Union army and navy. By the end of February 1865, Union forces occupied Wilmington, and General Braxton Bragg's army was in full retreat into the interior of North Carolina. With Wilmington secured, General William Sherman advanced through the Carolinas with less concern about being attacked by Confederate forces coming out of Wilmington. Sherman coordinated his efforts and marched through North Carolina, accepting the surrender of General Joseph E. Johnston's army at Durham Station, North Carolina on April 26, 1865, just over two weeks after Lee had surrendered to U.S. Grant at Appomattox Courthouse, Virginia.¹

By the time Sherman and Johnston met at the Bennett Farm outside of Durham Station, the Confederate government was on the run. After the cruise of the *Tallahassee*, Wood repaired to Richmond to resume his duties as aide to his uncle. He remained by Davis's side during the embarrassing flight of the Confederate government from Richmond during April and May 1865. Unwilling to accept defeat, Davis and his entourage planned to escape to the Trans-Mississippi territory to coordinate further Confederate resistance. Wood's and Davis's hopes for Confederate sovereignty were diminishing by the day. The Confederate government was now composed of a small band of men, horses, wagons, and a small amount of gold from the treasury. As the party made its way through the backwoods of South Carolina and Georgia, children brought flowers to the fleeing president, scattering them in front of his horse. "My heart rises to

¹ Fonvielle, *The Wilmington Campaign*, 249-296, 426-437; Mark L. Bradley, *This Astounding Close: The Road to Bennett Place* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 2000), 214-230.

my throat whenever I see it,” Wood wrote. However unready this band of refugees was to accept surrender, they were not able to outrun Federal cavalry assigned to track them down. Outside of Irwinville, Georgia, on May 10, 1865, Davis and most of his men were captured. Although Davis was taken prisoner, Wood managed to escape by bribing a guard with coins from the Confederate treasury. Certain that he would be tried for piracy as a result of the *Tallahassee* raid, Wood made his way through Florida and out of the country. Along with the last Confederate Secretary of War John Breckinridge and a small party, Wood guided a small open boat to Cuba. In Cuba Wood booked passage on a steamer to Halifax, Nova Scotia.²

Wood’s deep disappointment in Confederate defeat led him to accept a life of exile in Halifax. Wood remained in the Nova Scotia port town for the rest of his life, rarely traveling back to the United States. Wood renewed communication with his father after the war, while a Confederate flag flew over his merchant commission business. Robert E. Lee’s family kept Wood apprised of social conditions and political affairs in the South. Eventually, Wood attempted to clear his name with the United States government. Even though Congress granted him amnesty in 1897, Wood remained in Halifax until his death in 1904. As a result of his absence from the South for so many years, Wood lost contact with many of his former comrades. He relished his isolation in Halifax, a “remote corner of the world.” Wood provided a few articles about his war experiences for the *Century Magazine*, but for the most part he became a forgotten man by the onset of the twentieth century.³

² McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 848-850; Entry for May 1, 1865, Wood Diary, Wood Papers, SHC; Francis R. Lubbock, “The Capture of Jefferson Davis,” *Southern Historical Society Papers* 5 (March 1878): 122-123; Shingleton, *Sea Ghost*, 145-197.

³ Shingleton, *Sea Ghost*, 198-206; Custis Lee to Wood, August 2, 1876, Fitzhugh Lee to Wood, November 8, 1889, Wood to the Senate & House of Representatives, U.S.A., March 19, 1897, Jonathan W. Daniel to Wood, February 1, 1897, Wood Papers, SHC; Wood to Jane Mikell, February 20, 1878, Jane Mikell Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

Yet Wood's Civil War career remains instructive to understanding the progress of the war. By the summer of 1864, Wood and likeminded Confederates, especially Jefferson Davis, believed that Confederate independence was still within their grasp. Davis planned several offensive campaigns with the hope of alleviating Federal pressure in Virginia and securing independence. Jubal Early's strike toward Washington was one part of the strategy, as was the aborted attempt to free Confederate prisoners from Point Lookout, Maryland. Wood was instrumental in the development of the abandoned Point Lookout plan, and this helped to shape his idea that a naval raid on the northeastern coast could have a similar effect. Hoping to whip up the sentiment of peace in New England and New York, Wood and Davis believed that a Confederate naval offensive might bridge the gap between Northeastern and Midwestern dissenters, and possibly result in the election of a presidential candidate that endorsed Confederate sovereignty. Wood's August cruise on the *Tallahassee* was also beneficial in easing the blockade around Wilmington, at least in the mind of Jefferson Davis and Confederate Secretary of the Navy Stephen Mallory. But as critics of the policy argued, the plan unleashed the opposite results.

Although Wood burned, scuttled, and captured thirty-one vessels during his twenty-day cruise, detractors claimed that his operations were against vessels of little monetary value and actually provoked the Union navy to increase the blockade around Wilmington. Only five months after the cruise, Fort Fisher fell, and just three months afterward, the Confederacy collapsed. In a matter of only eight months, the Confederacy's hopes for sovereignty were dashed. Union morale had plummeted to a new low by the summer of 1864, which Wood and Davis sensed when planning the cruise of the *Tallahassee*. The Federal victory at Atlanta in early September 1864 bolstered the confidence of Northerners and erased any doubts of defeat

that Wood hoped to exploit with his mission. Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles issued a new set of directives to his cruisers searching for “rebel pirates,” as Northerners focused on capitulation of the Confederacy. Wilmington, now viewed not only as a haven for blockade runners, but also as a nest for pirates, was made a special target by the Northern press. Commerce raiding missions out of Wilmington during the fall of 1864, none nearly successful as the August 1864 cruise of the *Tallahassee*, increased political and popular support for an attack against the Confederacy’s last major seaport. Inflexible, Davis and Mallory did not foresee the repercussions of their commerce raiding policy. As Lee had predicted, the fall of Wilmington doomed his army and thus the Confederacy. The August 1864 cruise of the CSS *Tallahassee* contributed to that demise. Ironically, a mission devised to secure Confederate independence actually played a part in the nation’s downfall.

Historians have mistakenly looked at the August 1864 cruise of the CSS *Tallahassee* as an isolated incident of Confederate commerce raiding. Some have dismissed the cruise as largely insignificant. But by considering the cruise in the context of the entire war, and taking into account not just the military imperatives, but political and diplomatic factors as well, one obtains a greater understanding of the importance of the cruise of the CSS *Tallahassee*, the destructive nature of the Civil War, the direction in which Davis wanted to take the war by the summer of 1864, the impact of military actions upon politics, and the reasons for ultimate Confederate defeat. The cruise of the CSS *Tallahassee* demonstrates just how miserable the business of the Civil War was. “What a terrible terrible curse is War,” John Taylor Wood confessed to his wife in 1862, after walking through the streets of Richmond, which were filled with sick and wounded soldiers.⁴ By 1864 Wood had become convinced that it was his duty to take the destructive war to the North. The cruise of the *Tallahassee* did, for a short time,

⁴ Wood to Lola Wood, July 5, 1862, Wood Papers, SHC.

accomplish that goal. At Wood's most defiant moment, though, victory proved to be fleeting. By the time Wood reached the shores of Cuba in 1865, his body was sunburned and battered and his clothes were tattered, symbolic of the erosion of the Confederate quest for independence.

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